DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN IN THE NEW WORLD: THE AMERICAN PERFORMANCE AND RECEPTION OF WAGNER'S CYCLE, 1850–1903

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Given the central position of Wagner's operas in art music culture over the past century and a half, the performance and reception of his works in various national contexts has received—and continues to receive—considerable scholarly attention. Of significant interest is the period of the late nineteenth century, when the composer's aesthetic theories and music were being introduced and disseminated on both sides of the Atlantic. This dissertation examines the early performance and reception history of Wagner's monumental operatic cycle, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in the social and cultural context of opera production and performance in the United States from 1850 to 1903. It considers the social and cultural processes that led to the incorporation of the work's operas into an ongoing repertory, about a decade before World War I interrupted the process of the assimilation of Wagner's legacy in American performances. This study is situated within the context of the vital transatlantic relationship between Germany and the U.S. that brought about the rise and dissemination of German musical culture—and in particular, Wagner's music—in the New World during this period. The chapters of the dissertation focus on two chief facilitators of this development: 1) German and German-American musicians who promoted the composer's music through performance; and 2) American critics who advocated on behalf of these works.

The production and reception of Wagner's *Ring* in nineteenth-century America was more than a simple cultural exchange; the process was one in which the U.S. (with certain cities at the forefront) came to define itself as a culturally progressive nation, open to the assimilation of German musical culture. Moreover, in bringing their music to American audiences, German musicians moved into the American musical world and in doing so, many became themselves American. Concerning the *Ring* dramas, this dissertation investigates the ways in which these musicians first introduced and disseminated the cycle's music to Americans, and the key role of German artists who were imported to the U.S. for the first American stagings of the work's operas. This discussion is positioned within a broader consideration of the social and economic
conditions that influenced the American production of Wagner opera, as it moved from the theatres of New York’s *Kleindeutschland* (Little Germany) to elite institutions such as the Metropolitan Opera House, and eventually, from the Metropolitan Opera to other major American cities.

In tandem with the early performance history of the *Ring* in the U.S., the American reception of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle is analyzed utilizing two methods. One is a demographic study of the audiences who were present at the operas’ performances in Bayreuth and the U.S. To ascertain what kinds of Americans went to performances of the *Ring* and the extent to which they were interested in its music (compared to other Wagner operas and foreign-language opera in general), extant records such as visitor lists, box office receipts, and recorded observations in the media are examined. These sources reveal that the nineteenth-century mania for Wagner in the United States was primarily led by the middle and upper-middle classes, comprising of Anglo- and German-Americans who were guided by the notion that cultivating an appreciation of his music enabled their social mobility. The other approach is an assessment of the opinions of American music critics, as published in reviews and articles for major newspapers and periodicals. At this time, the influx of Wagner’s music into the United States was accompanied by the parallel rise of music criticism as a profession. Certain journalists stood to shape the tastes of Americans for his operas and in this study, their responses to the music and staging of the *Ring* dramas at different historical points are evaluated in detail. In sum, the writings of these critics document their shifting attitudes to, and changing experiences with, the *Ring* operas, as they were coming to terms with the composer’s aesthetic theories and works, while seeking to groom American audiences for them.
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INTRODUCTION

“A production of Wagner’s Ring cycle has become the entry card for any opera company that wants to be considered big time.”


In January 2011, New York Times music critic Anthony Tommasini embarked on a multi-article discussion about identifying the “top ten” classical music composers. While such an endeavor might seem misguided or ludicrous to some music scholars, it highlights our preoccupations with certain composers and their music, specifically those works that continue to have contemporary relevance in today’s concert halls and opera theatres. Among Tommasini’s choices, which included Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Debussy, Stravinsky, Brahms, and Bartók, were the two titans of operatic music born in 1813: Verdi and Wagner. While he might have given other justifiable reasons for including Wagner on his list, Tommasini simply wrote the statement, quoted above, that “Wagner’s Ring cycle has become the entry card for any opera company that wants to be considered big time.”

His observation is convincing. Two centuries after Wagner’s birth, and over 130 years after the world premiere of the entire Ring cycle at the first Bayreuth Festival, there are more performances of Wagner’s monumental tetralogy in opera houses around the world than ever before. Despite the complex and disturbing features of Wagner reception in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century, interest in the composer’s art, especially his Ring cycle, has since taken on an increasingly international dimension. Over the past decade alone, productions of the cycle have taken place in Scotland (Glasgow), Russia (St. Petersburg), Finland (Helsinki), Denmark (Copenhagen), Mexico (Mexico City), Brazil (Manaus), Japan (Tokyo), Australia (Adelaide), and Canada (Toronto), all indigenous to these cities and nations (i.e. not by touring companies from elsewhere). Meanwhile, other established opera companies in European cities, such as in Milan, Paris, and London, as well as in various German cities including Bayreuth,

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have offered new, and sometimes provocative, stagings of the operas. In the United States too a number of lavish productions have been presented in Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York.

While Tommasini’s statement seems to neatly encapsulate the *Ring* cycle’s significance today, it also raises the question of why it appears to be Wagner’s cycle, and not some other operatic work, that now defines one pinnacle of opera production, or perhaps to a certain extent, even cultural progress, in cities all over the world. The answer (or answers) is and are decidedly complex. This issue forms the starting point for my investigation into the work’s relevance in the United States, viewed from an historical perspective. Specifically, this dissertation examines the early performance and reception history of Wagner’s *Ring* in the social and cultural context of opera production and performance in America from 1850 to 1903. I consider the social and cultural processes that led to the incorporation of the work’s operas into an ongoing repertory, about a decade before World War I interrupted the process of the assimilation of Wagner’s legacy in American performances. The study is situated within the context of the vital transatlantic relationship between Germany and the United States that brought about the rise and dissemination of German musical culture—and in particular, Wagner’s music—in the New World during this period. This dissertation focuses on two chief facilitators of this development: 1) German and German-American musicians who promoted the composer’s music through performance; and 2) American critics who advocated on behalf of these works, helping shape American tastes for them.

The production and reception of Wagner’s *Ring* in nineteenth-century America was more than a simple cultural exchange. I argue that the process was one in which the U.S. (with certain cities at the forefront) came to define itself as a culturally progressive nation, open to the assimilation of foreign culture, in this case, German musical culture. Moreover, in bringing their music to American audiences, German musicians moved into the American musical world and
in doing so, many became themselves American. Concerning the Ring operas in particular, I investigate the ways in which these musicians first introduced and disseminated the cycle’s music to Americans, and the key role of German artists who were imported to the U.S. for the first American stagings of the work’s operas. This discussion is positioned within a broader consideration of the social and economic conditions that influenced the American production of Wagner opera, as it moved from the theatres of New York’s Kleindeutschland (Little Germany) to elite institutions such as the Metropolitan Opera House, and eventually, from the Metropolitan Opera to other major American cities.

In tandem with the early performance history of the Ring in the U.S., I examine the American reception of the cycle utilizing two methods. One is a demographic study of the audiences who were present at the operas’ performances in Bayreuth and the U.S. To ascertain what kinds of Americans went to performances of the Ring and the extent to which they were interested in its music (compared to other Wagner operas and foreign-language opera in general), I analyze extant records such as visitor lists, box office receipts, and recorded observations in the media. As my investigation shows, the nineteenth-century mania for Wagner in the United States was primarily led by the middle and upper-middle classes (encompassing Anglo- and German-Americans) who were guided by the notion that cultivating an appreciation of his music enabled their social mobility. The other approach is an assessment of the opinions of American music critics, as published in reviews and articles for major newspapers and periodicals. These journalists’ responses to the music and staging of the cycle’s operas at different historical points are evaluated in detail. We should recall that the influx of European music to the United States was accompanied by the parallel rise of music criticism as a profession. With Wagner’s music, and the Ring in particular, this development reflected the changing “horizon of expectations” (to use Hans Robert Jauss’s term) and shifting attitudes of the press as various generations of critics came to terms with the composer’s aesthetic theories.
and works, while seeking to groom American audiences for them.²

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Given the central position of Wagner’s operas in art music culture over the past century and a half, the performance and reception of his works in various national contexts has received—and continues to receive—considerable scholarly attention. Of particular interest is the period from 1850 to 1918, when the composer’s aesthetic theories and music were being introduced and disseminated on both sides of the Atlantic. To date, the majority of studies examine this development as it occurred in different European regions, including Russia, Poland, the Czech lands, Scandinavia, Italy, the Netherlands, and England.³ Concerning Wagner’s music in the American context, the most significant survey remains Joseph Horowitz’s Wagner Nights: An American History.⁴ On the American performance and reception of the Ring cycle, Horowitz devotes only a part of a single chapter. Yet, this topic invites deeper investigation because the entry of the Ring dramas into the United States during this period challenged—more so than any other of Wagner’s works—American perceptions and methods of opera production and reception. Eventually though, through cycles of assimilation, they did

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² The “horizon of expectations” is fundamental concept in Hans Robert Jauss’s theory of a literary history which articulates that a reader’s reception of a text is shaped by the cultural conventions of the particular historical moment in which he/she lives; see his Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.) Aspects of Jauss’s theory have since been applied to studies of reception histories of musical works, with a central theme being how reception relates to canon formation; see Mark Everist, “Reception Theories, Canonic Discourses, and Musical Value,” in Rethinking Music, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; repr. 2001), 378–402.


become part of the performing operatic repertory.\(^5\) This dissertation aims to unpack the processes that affected this gradual integration of the *Ring* operas into American musical culture.

The major link that was formed during the nineteenth century between Germany and the United States, in part, as a result of massive waves of immigration to the New World, is the historical backdrop to the advent of American Wagnerism. Horowitz, among others, has highlighted the significant role of certain German-immigrant musicians in introducing and disseminating Wagner’s music to Americans, but the extent to which they facilitated—and themselves embodied—this transatlantic connection, and how they specifically shaped the early performances and reception of the *Ring* operas, is considered in greater depth in this project. Conductors such as Theodore Thomas and Anton Seidl not only brought the cycle’s music to Americans, but importantly, were responsible for cultivating a significant cultural association between Bayreuth and U.S. cities such as New York, Boston, and Chicago. Through Thomas’s initiative, for instance, Americans heard the first musical excerpts from *Die Walküre* in the early 1870s, which in turn, generated significant interest and even direct financial support for the Bayreuth Festival in 1876. Ultimately, this led to a substantial group of Americans traveling to Bayreuth to witness the world premiere of the *Ring* cycle. Subsequently, the 1876 production—despite its shortcomings—became the model for the American stagings, both visually and to an extent, musically. The following decade, Anton Seidl led the first definitive productions of the *Ring* operas in the U.S. at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House and on tour to Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and Milwaukee. To these American performances, Seidl brought his specific knowledge and experience gained while working directly with Wagner.

in Bayreuth, having assisted the composer with the 1876 production, and subsequently conducted the cycle in numerous performances across Europe. Singers who had either worked directly with Wagner or Seidl were engaged for the American presentations of the *Ring*. Later, in the 1890s, European and American singers who had made their careers in the American performances of Wagner’s operas were invited in turn by Cosima Wagner to perform in subsequent Bayreuth Festivals. Seidl himself returned to conduct at Bayreuth in 1897, but his contact to the Bayreuth circle in the intervening period had been limited.

Within the same context, this dissertation also considers how the American reception of Wagner’s *Ring* in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was affected by the transnational exchange of information, a process that was then becoming increasingly sophisticated. Music critics became the primary arbiters of this exchange, and because of their profession, stood to shape public taste for Wagner’s music, through their communication and evaluation of the composer’s aesthetic theories as well as his music in performance. In the United States, American journalists were instrumental in relaying to their readers fresh news about Wagner’s music, well before Americans even saw a fully staged performance. In the mid-nineteenth century, writers and editors, such as John Sullivan Dwight, made available Wagner’s theoretical writings through their journals, translating and reprinting articles from abroad about the composer and performances of his operas. However, these commentators mostly responded with skepticism to the first performances of Wagner’s music, questioning its long-term appeal. By 1876, American interest in Wagner’s music had grown to the extent that the world premiere of the *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth became a watershed moment for American music critics: this was the first time they were expressly sent abroad to witness and report on a musical event for their respective newspapers. When staged productions of the cycle’s operas began to be given consistently at

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New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, a new generation of critics turned their attention to grooming American tastes for them through the print medium, devising strategies to help audiences make sense of the musical complexities of the operas and advising them on the finer points of Wagnerian aesthetics and performance practice. By this time, their particular position allowed them access to performances of the *Ring* operas that were occurring on both sides of the Atlantic, fostered by the growing ease of transcontinental and transatlantic travel. Such accumulated experience gave them a certain authority about the staging of the *Ring* that they sought to communicate in their reviews.

Far from just being a parallel development, the blossoming interest in—and the performance of—Wagner’s cycle in Europe and in the United States were closely linked. This phenomenon was part of a broader assimilation German music into American art music culture. Recently, a few scholars have begun to assess the nature of this process. Among them, Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht has argued that the effort of German-immigrant musicians to introduce German art music to Americans arose as a form of soft diplomacy. These artists, she describes, exhibited an almost missionary impulse to import [serious music] to their New World audiences. [However, they] did not draw their legitimacy from German unification or that their original mission was to build and expand abroad the political influence of the German states or the Reich. To the contrary, the German artists’ national self-perception was principally cultured, politically vague, and highly heterogeneous, and it primarily served as a “cognitive model,” an instrument to situate themselves in a pluralistic environment and seek international recognition. When they expressed their desire to bring serious music and German Kultur to the United States, they aimed for universality, not exclusion.7

Hecht further claims that most Americans in the late nineteenth century did not see this influx of German musical culture as forced upon them (at least, not initially), but rather, in the face of a perceived lack of indigenous “high art” culture, openly—albeit gradually—adopted it as their own. With orchestral symphonic music as the chief focus of her study, however, she touches little on Wagner’s operas as part of these developments, concluding that in the U.S.,

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they “entered the canon to the extent that no Italian opera composer had.” Given that she does not elaborate further, her assertion merits deeper consideration. Issues of repertory formation or the notion of a canon of exemplary works touch upon complex matters.8 While the trajectory of Wagner’s works in the American context was similar to—and indeed, even a significant part of—the influx and dissemination of Germanic symphonic music during the late nineteenth century, it was also decidedly more convoluted. This is because the American naturalization of Wagner’s operas was deeply connected to the various social and economic factors that shaped the development of certain cities and institutions which fostered the production and reception of foreign-language opera during this period. The process by which the staged performances of Wagner’s works started in Kleindeutschland theatres (such as the New York Stadttheater) just after the mid-century, but then progressed to being presented mostly in elite institutions such as the Academy of Music and later the Metropolitan Opera House appears to exemplify Lawrence Levine’s model of “sacralization”. The smelly, boozy environments of the German-immigrant theatres were felt, especially by Anglo-American elites, to be not conducive to supporting the notion of opera being a “higher form” of art requiring a cultivated audience.9 However, it could be said that this development was beneficial both to the performance and reception of Wagner’s works in the American context, especially the Ring dramas. Environments such as the Metropolitan Opera, divested of any association to the German-immigrant community, helped to foster the idea of German music/German opera being culturally “universal” rather than “nationalistic”. At the same time, the German artists experienced in the Wagner method “imported” for the early American performances of the Ring gave these presentations a certain cachet, because it was felt it was they who had the knowledge, the skill, and the will to understand and carry out the composer’s intentions.10

10 According to Levine, the increased distance between the amateur and the professional musician was another
This dissertation examines the first significant historical phase of the performance and reception of Wagner’s *Ring* dramas in the United States: between 1850 and 1903. This period encompasses the time Americans first learned about the *Ring* project to the early establishment of the operas in the American operatic repertory. As discussed previously, this development was facilitated by the burgeoning transatlantic relationship between Germany and the United States, which to varying degrees, directly impacted on the American productions of the *Ring* operas and American audiences’ responses to them. By 1903, however, the sense of an open cultural exchange between the two countries had shifted towards increasingly nationalistic and isolationistic attitudes on both sides of the Atlantic. Within this complex context arose the gradual estrangement of artistic relations between Bayreuth/Germany and New York, exacerbated by Heinrich Conried’s 1903 production of *Parsifal* performed by the Metropolitan Opera Company against the wishes of Wagner’s widow, Cosima. Ultimately, the tension between Germany and America culminated with the U.S.’s entry into World War I against Germany. In light of this trajectory, already by 1903, the American reception of Wagner’s music was characterized by a reframing of critical views towards his operas. Joseph Horowitz, notably, has described this period as the decline of American Wagnerism, that is, no longer associated with Gilded Age notions of uplift and progressivism but rather, recast as a kind of conservatism, compared to the modernist tendencies of art then emerging from Europe.\(^{11}\) On the basis of these factors, I maintain that a separate new phase in the American history of Wagner production and reception begins in 1903, one that warrants its own detailed examination, beyond the scope of the present project.

Much of my investigation into the early history of Wagner’s *Ring* in the United States concentrates on the cities of New York, Boston, and Chicago. During the latter half of the

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nineteenth century, these places became centers for the performance of Wagner's music, with New York being the main hub. With their substantial and diverse populations, including large numbers of German immigrants, these metropolises were able to support a large variety of musical organizations and institutions, and frequent presentations of Wagner opera. However, being technologically and artistically demanding, as the 1876 world premiere proved, the operas of the *Ring* cycle ultimately defied all but a few companies which had the financial and artistic resources to be able to present them with sufficient success. To this extent, the *Ring*’s early performance history in the New World contributed significantly to the establishment of New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, the predecessor of today’s Metropolitan Opera, as a premier institution for foreign-language opera. Built in 1883 through the auspices of the city’s social elite, the theatre—and the resident companies affiliated with it—became the first “German” opera house in the entire country to present on stage nearly all of Wagner’s operas, including the complete *Ring* cycle, between 1885 and 1903. During this period, the Metropolitan’s companies gave exclusively over 230 staged presentations in the U.S. of the *Ring* operas, performing them in nearly every season. Moreover, these companies were then the only troupes to tour with the cycle’s operas to other major American cities, among them, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia. Later in the 1890s, Walter Damrosch’s Opera Company also gave nearly 100 performances of the *Ring* operas, to American audiences as far west as Denver and as far south as New Orleans.

It bears clarifying that this project focuses primarily on public performances of the *Ring* operas, that is, either staged presentations of the opera or the performance of excerpts from the opera that frequently appeared on orchestral, recital, and concert band programs during this period. To be sure, Wagner’s music for the *Ring* was also being played in the homes of the middle class, with piano transcriptions of orchestral excerpts being the dominant type; such arrangements were perhaps the most accessible means by which Americans encountered the music of the *Ring* at this time. Despite being only pale reflections of the full score, they
nevertheless were an educative tool, helping audiences to further absorb the music of the dramas, usually in preparation of experiencing staged performances. However, if Wagner’s music, especially the music of his monumental Ring, was to succeed in being part of American music culture, it had to be disseminated through public performance and audiences had to be cultivated for it. As this study will show, enterprising German-American conductors and musicians as well as critics were the primary instigators of this development.

In investigating the early performance and reception of the Ring within the American context, my study involves certain limitations. Concerning the stagings of the cycle’s operas, I seek to describe what American audiences heard and saw. Unfortunately, many sources such as rehearsal scores, production notes, scenic and costume sketches, etc. detailing the American productions of the Ring from this period, are no longer extant. For information bearing on the visual aspects of these performances, I rely predominantly on detailed explanatory articles from cultural and technical journals such as Scribner’s Magazine and The Scientific American. In the latter the stage technology used for the presentations of the Ring operas at the Metropolitan Opera House from 1885 to 1903 was a subject of particular interest. I also examine contemporary reports about the performances as published in newspapers; these are useful in that American critics often evaluated the efficacy of the stage effects, as well as the quality of the dramatic and musical performances by the singers. We know from such accounts that, like many other European theatres at the time, the first productions of the cycle in the U.S. sought to reproduce Wagner’s production from the 1876 Bayreuth Festival. I investigate the challenges faced by the American companies which presented the Ring operas as they tried to recreate the original version for diverse audiences, including performances on tour. To lend their productions the cachet of Bayreuth, they went beyond just replicating the visual elements;


13 Douglas Hubbell has previously examined the Scientific American as a chief source about nineteenth-century theatre technology such as at the Metropolitan Opera House, in “The Scientific American and its Supplement as Sources of Information about Theatre Technology,” PhD diss., Indiana University, 1978.
impresarios also invited to the United States German artists that had either worked with the composer directly in Bayreuth or had performed the cycle in Europe, among them, the Wagner protégé and conductor Anton Seidl and various singers who sang the title roles. I have given attention to the extent to which they brought their European experience to bear on the U.S. presentations of the Ring operas.

To assess the reception of Wagner’s cycle, critical responses in nineteenth-century America and Europe cannot be ignored. Music journalists at this time in the United States stood to shape the American reception of composer’s Ring operas. For this project, I have limited my examination to major American English- and German-language newspapers and journals—notably, those that employed professional music critics and had the widest circulation—in the cities in which the operas of the Ring were performed. The published record of reviews and articles they left behind is significant in that it provides evidence of distinct shifts in opinion about Wagner’s operas among successive generations of American critics, moving from initial skepticism of the mid-century to the strong advocacy of the 1880s and 90s. The views of critics who worked in New York, Boston, and Chicago were particularly influential, even in other cities, since their articles were often reprinted in other local American newspapers. In sum, the press reception of Wagner’s music, particularly in the late nineteenth century, is an area of scholarship worth continued investigation, because music journalism at this time had an important function in facilitating inter-city and transatlantic dialogue about the composer’s theories and operas.

Besides critical reviews and articles, broad demographic analyses of audiences, when possible, can help to provide a fuller picture of American reception of the *Ring* dramas in performance. In this study, I use box office records and receipts, observations documented in the press, and visitor lists, to determine the size of audience, as well as class, gender, nationality, etc. of attendees in order to construct a profile of what kinds of Americans were interested in and attended staged presentations of the operas. Such sources can be revealing; for example, the core audience for Wagner’s operas in various U.S. cities was comprised of mostly middle- or upper-middle class individuals who usually sat in the galleries of the theatre. In cities with significant German-immigrant populations such as New York and Chicago, a good proportion of this core audience consisted of German-Americans. Women too formed a significant and often enthusiastic portion of the audience, frequenting matinee performances and setting up clubs in which they could study the music of the *Ring* in groups. Based on this kind of information, conclusions can be drawn about what the dramas meant to these groups, and why it was important to them to cultivate their appreciation for these operas.

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The first chapter of this dissertation examines the beginning of Americans’ evolving interest in Wagner’s *Ring* project, from around 1850 to before the cycle’s premiere in 1876, and how it was shaped by the vital cross-cultural exchange between Europe and the U.S. that developed as a result of the vigorous expansion of immigration of Germans to the New World. This transatlantic link was crucial to the initial transmission of Wagnerian opera and artistic philosophy to Americans. Central to this discussion (and for the most part, the rest of the dissertation) are those three cities—New York, Boston, and Chicago—whose socio-cultural conditions enabled them to become the primary incubators of German musical culture, and notably, of Wagner’s music, in the U.S. This was due in part to the influx of millions of Germans, many of them middle-class, into these metropolitan areas, where a majority of them settled permanently, during the second half of the century. These immigrants included musicians who
were the first to promote Wagner’s music in American concert halls and theatres. Ultimately, this
development set the scene for the American careers of important Wagnerian conductors
including Theodore Thomas and Anton Seidl. Meanwhile, journalists of the American printed
press were coming to terms with these performances and the debate surrounding Wagner’s
works and his revolutionary ideas for opera. Their shifting attitudes, from initial skepticism to
advocacy, can be traced over three periods: from 1848 to 1863, 1864 to 1870, and 1870 to
1876. This chapter concludes with a reappraisal of the circumstances surrounding Theodore
Thomas’s commission to Wagner for a march celebrating the centenary of the founding of the
United States. With an excess of optimism, Thomas hoped that this commission would elevate
America’s standing vis-à-vis the Old World as a place of cultural progress.

The 1876 Bayreuth Festival was perhaps the first major musical event in history to be a
truly trans-Atlantic affair, drawing visitors and the media from all over Europe and North
America. The American angle has yet to be considered in studies of foreign visitors at Bayreuth,
such as Hannu Salmi’s investigation of Scandinavian tourists, or the international media
reception of the first Festival, as recently surveyed by Herbert Schneider.15 In Chapter 2, I
provide a detailed assessment of Americans’ involvement in this event. I describe the American
tourists who went to Bayreuth, based on the extant 1876 Fremdenlisten (the published list of
registered visitors to the Festival), as well as analyze the accounts of American critics who were
sent abroad expressly to report on the performances. As the largest group of visitors from
outside Europe, Americans formed a distinctive unit within the total audience.

Chapter 3 examines the American performance and reception of the Ring cycle’s music,
following the 1876 Bayreuth Festival and up until the beginning of the German seasons at the
Metropolitan Opera House in 1884. During this period, many opera companies in Europe were

15 “Die Eröffnung der Bayreuther Festspiele 1876 als internationales Medienereignis, in Medienereignisse im 18. und
Reichart, ed. Christine Vogel, Herbert Schneider, and Carl Horst (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009);
165–217.
eager to stage the *Ring* operas in their own theatres, and Americans were no exception. In 1877, the Fryer-Neuendorff company gave the first fully-staged American production of *Die Walküre*, one which later generations of critics dismissed as substandard. Yet, in the view of Joseph Horowitz, these early performances succeeded in offering Americans “their first opportunity to experience something like mature Wagnerian music drama.” These first staged performances of *Die Walküre* posed significant musical and theatrical challenges. A study of the press reception to the New York and Boston premieres of the opera uncovers the struggle of critics to respond to less-than-ideal stagings of what was to them Wagner’s newest and most significant work. Meanwhile, this period also witnessed a significant rise in the performance of concert excerpts from his operas, in and beyond the “Wagner centers” of New York, Boston, and Chicago. I examine the efforts of conductors like Theodore Thomas and Leopold Damrosch to disseminate the music of the *Ring* throughout the U.S. With no further staged performances until 1885, excerpts were the chief means by which most Americans experienced the work.

Chapter 4 explores the transatlantic context that was formative to the first American presentations of the *Ring* operas in the mid-1880s. I discuss how the founding and establishment New York’s Metropolitan Opera House and its resident companies created the conditions to guarantee the mutual success of the house and of Wagner’s operas with American audiences. These circumstances ultimately enticed the Hungarian conductor and Wagner protégé Anton Seidl to immigrate to America and assume the role of music director at the Metropolitan Opera House. By the time he arrived in New York in 1885, Seidl had already helped the composer prepare for the premieres of the *Ring* and *Parsifal* in the 1876 and 1882 Bayreuth Festivals, assisted in the stagings of the cycle in Leipzig and Berlin, and had just completed a ten-month tour conducting the *Ring* all over Europe with Angelo Neumann’s travelling Wagner theatre. All this experience he channeled into the American presentations of the cycle’s operas, which he conducted many times individually between 1885 and 1891, while

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16 Wagner Nights, 50.
leading the American premiere of the entire cycle in 1889. In the latter part of this chapter, I examine Seidl’s scenic notebook documenting the 1876 rehearsals from before the cycle’s Bayreuth premiere, to determine how Wagner’s ideas concerning the music and the staging of the *Ring* directly shaped Seidl’s own approach. The first complete transcription and translation of this notebook accompanies this analysis.

With Seidl’s guidance on nearly every aspect of the Metropolitan’s first productions of the *Ring* operas, American audiences appeared to have experienced reasonably authoritative performances of them. But what did Americans actually see and hear? Chapter 5 broadly examines three key aspects of the early American production of these works: 1) the text and music that was performed; 2) the singers who portrayed the major roles of the operas; and 3) the stage technology at the Metropolitan Opera that facilitated the various complex scenic effects. While the American performances were not exactly like the 1876 Bayreuth production, the original was nevertheless influential, in look and in sound. This was intentional; Edmund Stanton, then the director of the Metropolitan’s resident company, clearly sought to establish the Bayreuthian credibility of these presentations by hiring German singers and stage managers already familiar with the Wagnerian method of opera performance and production. This chapter thus seeks to illuminate the vital transatlantic connection that tied the early performance history of the *Ring* in the United States to the cycle’s origins in Germany.

In Chapter 6, I examine the reception of the American performances of the *Ring* operas, given in New York and on tour by Stanton’s company, during the Metropolitan Opera’s German seasons. This investigation focuses primarily on the responses of American critics, thus continuing the exploration begun earlier in the dissertation concerning the changing expectations and reactions of those writing about the cycle since the mid-nineteenth century. By the mid-1880s, yet another generation of music critics who wrote for the major dailies and journals of various U.S. cities rose to prominence. Aside from seeking to evaluate the early presentations of the cycle’s operas, these journalists were also unified in their strong advocacy
for the composer’s music; they sought to shape Americans’ appreciation by educating them on how to listen as well as on what constitutes good Wagnerian singing and staging.

The final chapter of this dissertation investigates the American performance and reception of Der Ring des Nibelungen within the changing socio-cultural landscape of opera production and performance in the U.S. between 1891 and 1903. At the Metropolitan Opera, while the theatre’s stockholders and directors had voted for the cessation of the performance of German-language—and more specifically, Wagnerian—opera, Walter Damrosch saw an opportunity to capitalize on a market still eager to experience the composer’s works on stage. He formed his own eponymous company in 1894 and for the next five years, it was instrumental in introducing more of the American public to staged presentations of Wagner’s operas.

Despite the reach and popularity of Damrosch’s company, its director found it challenging to produce only German-language operas. Henry Abbey and Maurice Grau, who were then managing the resident company at the Metropolitan, also struggled to present entire seasons of solely French and Italian operas. Thus, both troupes came to develop the “wing” system, in which French, Italian, and German operas were equally represented in a single season, performed by singers and conductors who specialized in their respective languages and operatic traditions. Through this scheme, the Ring cycle became absorbed into the operatic performance repertory, particularly during the tenure of Maurice Grau at the Metropolitan between 1898 and 1903. The final part of this chapter investigates his company’s production of the Ring’s operas, including the first uncut performances of the complete cycle in America.
CHAPTER I: Wagner and the “Music of the Future” in the New World, 1848–1876

I am now thinking a good deal of America! Not because I might find what I am looking for there, but because the ground there is easier to plant. …I am planning to make a start soon on my great Nibelung trilogy. But I shall perform it only on the banks of the Mississippi.

--Richard Wagner, Zurich, December 30, 1851

Mirroring as it did the waves of European immigration during the decades following the revolutionary uprisings in Europe of 1848–1849, the American interest in Richard Wagner and his music flourished as a potent cultural phenomenon of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. A key aspect of this blossoming centered on the composer’s epic tetralogy Der Ring des Nibelungen, the four-opera cycle first performed at Bayreuth in 1876, the year of the American centennial celebrations. The performance and reception of Wagner’s Ring cycle in the American context is the main subject of the present dissertation, but to place it into historical perspective, we must go back to the mid-nineteenth century, when the composer’s music and theories were being introduced to Americans. This background enables us to gain a fuller understanding of how Americans first came to terms with Wagner’s operas, and supplies the essential background for grasping their later response to his magnum opus, the Ring cycle.

Especially important to this investigation are three cities—New York, Boston, and Chicago—whose socio-cultural conditions enabled them to become key incubators of European art music culture, and notably, German musical culture, in the U.S. The rise of the latter in the second half of the nineteenth century was, in part, due to the influx of millions of Germans into the United States, the majority of which settled permanently in these cities. By the end of the century, New York City had become the third-largest German-speaking community in the world, and Chicago, the second largest in the nation. Most of the Germans who arrived during the mid-century surge of immigration belonged to the middle class, and were specialists of various trades as well as intellectuals and academics, seeking financial prosperity and stability in the New World. Among them as well were musicians and many who valued music; over time, their

1 Letter to Ernst Benedikt Kietz, in SL, 243.
physical presence and integration into American life led to the acculturation of German music and culture, particularly the symphonic genre. Yet, they were also instrumental in shaping the performance and reception of Wagner’s operas in nineteenth-century America as his works were first being presented. It was a gradual process; as Adrienne Fried Block has stressed, the contributions of Austro-German musicians were too prominent to be readily assimilated into a pre-existing American cultural environment. This development set the scene for the American careers of important Wagnerian conductors including Theodore Thomas and Anton Seidl.

It is thus necessary in some ways, to consider the American cultivation of Wagner as a direct extension of German and European developments. This chapter examines the first phase of Americans’ evolving interest in Wagner’s Ring project before the cycle’s premiere in 1876, within the context of the vital cross-cultural exchange between Europe and the U.S. that developed as a result of the vigorous immigration of Germans to the New World. This transatlantic link was crucial to the initial transmission of Wagnerian opera and artistic philosophy to Americans. The process was affected over three periods: 1848 to 1863, 1864 to 1870, and 1870 to 1876. As we shall see, two groups were particularly responsible for fostering this relationship: 1) the German-immigrant musicians who promoted Wagner’s music in American concert halls and theatres; 2) the journalists of the American printed press who were drawn into the debate surrounding Wagner’s works and his revolutionary ideas for opera.

Part I: 1848–1863

American First Encounters with the “Music of the Future”

To properly contextualize the impact of Wagner’s music when it was first introduced to Americans, it is useful to summarize briefly the condition of musical life in New York, Boston,
and Chicago, during the mid-nineteenth century. At that time, art music culture in these three cities was on the ascent and flourishing. New York especially, with the nation’s largest population, sustained a vibrant cultural life. Opera, performed in Italian, English, French, and German languages by various itinerant troupes from Europe, drew diverse audiences to theatres like Astor Place, Niblo’s Garden, and later, the Academy of Music, as both Karen Alhquist and Katherine Preston have shown.\(^4\) The Italian works of Donizetti, Rossini, and Verdi soon dominated the repertory for their popularity among the audiences of these venues. \textit{Klein Deutschland} on the lower East Side by then also supported a rich array of musical and theatrical venues for the fast-growing, German-immigrant population. Only quite recently has this legacy been explored in detail in studies such as John Koegel’s book \textit{Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840–1940} and the collection \textit{European Music & Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900}, edited by John Graziano.\(^5\) At the Stadttheater, German-language operas by Beethoven, Mozart, Weber, and Flotow were frequently staged, along with Italian and French works in translation. Professional German musicians dominated the city’s various chamber and orchestral societies; for instance, nearly half of the members of the Philharmonic Society at this time were German-American.\(^6\) Their notable presence during the early history of these ensembles helped influence the gradual solidification of the Austro-German symphonic repertoire into a “canon”.

In Boston, where the Handel and Haydn Society and the Philharmonic Society had long been active, sacred vocal music as well as symphonic and chamber music were cultivated rigorously, although opera was gradually nurtured and accepted at the Boston Theatre. Bostonians also excelled in the realm of music criticism and publishing, having no less than


\(^6\) To date, Howard Shanet’s \textit{Philharmonic: A History of New York’s Orchestra} is still the definitive source on the orchestra’s early history (New York: Doubleday, 1975).
fourteen music-related periodicals in circulation by the 1850s (whereas New York had only nine). Meanwhile, Chicago too was ascending quickly to prominence as the cultural bastion of the Midwest. First settled by Americans from New York, New England, and Pennsylvania in the 1830s, and then by thousands of German immigrants two decades later, it did not take long for the city to develop its own burgeoning art music industry. In the late 1850s, musical activity picked up significantly in Chicago, when the Pittsburgh and Fort Wayne Railway lines began to offer regular service from New York, thus enabling opera troupes and touring orchestras access to the nation’s interior. By the end of the Civil War, Chicago’s important connection to the East Coast had transformed it into a major hub for opera and symphonic performance in the U.S.

This brief historical sketch encapsulates the general state of art music culture in three major American cities at the time Wagner himself first contemplated coming to the “New World”. Following his participation in the failed revolutionary uprising of May 1849 in Dresden, Wagner had escaped to Zurich, but many of his compatriots—members of the intellectual, middle, and working classes—headed across the Atlantic, enticed by America’s promise of “material abundance, religious tolerance, and social mobility.” A few of his friends tried to persuade him to join them but Wagner remained uncertain. While he recognized that cities like New York offered mobility, and potentially wealth, for the free professional musician, he felt that the highly commercialized nature of American musical life was not conducive to what he really wanted to do: to compose and see his works staged. As he explained to his friend, Ferdinand Heine, in a letter from November 11, 1849:

America for me now and always can be of only financial interest; but if circumstances here at home remain such that I finally run out of air to breathe, I might finally cast my eye in the direction of America, but only to become a craftsman there—albeit with a

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7 According to James Deaville, “the first piano arrived in 1834, the first sheet music was sold in 1835, the first instrument dealer set up shop in 1836, and the first concert society gave performances (four in number) during the 1835–36 season.” Music journalism in Chicago was also quickly established as a profession. See Deaville’s article, “The Origins of Music Journalism in Chicago: Criticism as a Reflection of Musical Life,” in American Musical Life in Context and Practice to 1865, ed. James R. Heintze (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1994), 231–64.

8 The notion of America as “the common man’s utopia” has been discussed by Marcus Hansen in The Atlantic Migration, 1607–1860 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 146–71.
baton in my hand—which would at least ensure me a better income there than it would here. *I have no children:* this is the difference between you and me: as the father of a family you are beginning a new and immeasurably long life in the new world; mine would be completely extinguished there with my death; so you will have a future there, I would have none; for me my art alone must be what your family is for you…

While he would entertain opportunities to come to the U.S. on several more occasions in his life, Wagner remained ambivalent at this time about whether New York or any other American city offered the suitable environment for him to realize his revolutionary operatic forms, and moreover, whether Americans in general would be the right kind of audience for them. Hence, he did not think he needed to be directly concerned with cultivating American audiences for his operas. But whereas Wagner perhaps underestimated Americans’ potential to fully appreciate his works, fortunately, he had several ambassadors in the New World who did take the initiative to introduce his music to them. These musicians were responsible for cultivating Americans’ initial experience of Wagner’s music, while in response to performances, critics began to come to terms with the composer’s aesthetic theories. Together, these developments form the indispensible framework for Americans’ induction into the *Ring* project.

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The first of these musical emissaries was Wagner’s fellow Saxon, Carl Bergmann (1821–76), who was the conductor of the Germania Musical Society, a traveling orchestra of twenty-five players originally from Berlin. A path-breaking ensemble characterized by self-government and democratic convictions, the “Germanians” had arrived in September 1848 in the wake of the failed revolutionary uprisings in Europe. Seeking to “enflame and stimulate in the hearts of these politically free people through numerous performances of the greatest instrumental composers […] love for the fine art of music”, they gave hundreds of concerts along the east coast of the U.S. and Canada, nine hundred alone under Bergmann’s direction, after he joined them in

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9 SL, 179.
In 1851, the Germania Society settled in Boston, offering Americans there seasonal subscription concerts to which they responded with significant enthusiasm. For repertoire, Bergmann and the Society took advantage of Bostonians’ discriminating tastes, performing symphonic works of the Austro-German tradition—i.e. Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven—as well as familiarizing them with the “music of the future”, compositions by Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner. Their initiative was guided by their progressive political and artistic ideals as outlined in their constitution: to advance American musical culture in line with current developments in Europe.\footnote{Bergmann joined the Society first as a cellist, then was elected unanimously by the ensemble to be its conductor. According to Newman, Bergmann was an active conductor of several ensembles between 1842–48 in Vienna, Breslau, Budapest, Warsaw, and Venice before he was forced to emigrate due to his involvement in the Vienna Revolution of March 1848. Little else is known about his early career and exactly how he came into contact with the “Germanians” in the United States.}

As is already well-known, the Germanians presented Wagner’s music to Americans in the form of excerpts from his operas. While in Boston between 1852 and 1854, the ensemble premiered portions of \textit{Rienzi}, \textit{Tannhäuser}, and \textit{Lohengrin}. The first of these was the Finale to \textit{Tannhäuser} (from Act III, also known as the “Venusberg Music”), which appeared in their first subscription concert on November 27, 1852 at the city’s Music Hall. The following season, with an enlarged orchestra of forty-nine players, they debuted several more selections, including: the Overture to \textit{Tannhäuser}; the Overture and the “Grand Finale und Waffentanz” from \textit{Rienzi}; and from \textit{Lohengrin}, the “Empfang beim Kaiser” (Reception at the Emperor’s), and the “Frauenchor, Zug der Frauen” (Procession of the Bride and Bridesmaids). The latter three extracts were premiered together in a special “Grand Wagner Night” concert on December 3, 1853, the first program to be devoted almost entirely to Wagner’s music.\footnote{The program also included the Overtures of \textit{Tannhäuser} and \textit{Rienzi} and the Ensemble and Chorus from \textit{Tannhäuser}. The playbill is reproduced on p.106 of Newman’s \textit{Good Music for a Free People.}} Many repeat presentations of these excerpts were given in Boston as well as in cities to where the orchestra toured. By the time they disbanded in September 1854, the Germania Musical Society had single-handedly brought the composer’s music to American audiences in Hartford, Providence, Worcester, Baltimore,
Newport, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Chicago, and New York. According to contemporary reports, audiences responded quite positively to these concert arrangements. It was the Germanians’ performances of Wagner’s music that originally sparked critical discussion about the composer’s works and his aesthetic theories in the American press. Indeed, the first major American article on Wagner to appear was a review of the orchestra’s premiere of the *Tannhäuser* Finale, in the Bostonian periodical *Dwight’s Journal of Music*. Founded by its editor John Sullivan Dwight (1813–1893) less than a year before, the journal soon established itself as a publication noteworthy for the depth and breadth of musical topics it explored, surviving until 1881. Although never widely popular, its readership must have been sufficiently educated and interested to appreciate its contents. As a source on Wagner, it was distinctive and influential since Dwight was the first to publish parts of Wagner’s theoretical works in English translation. The issues dating from the early-1850s contain a remarkable offering of substantial extracts from *Oper und Drama* (*Opera and Drama*, 1851), as well as biographical articles translated and reprinted from French and German periodicals.

This journal served as a vital transatlantic medium, through which Americans, particularly Anglo-Americans, were conveyed contemporaneous reportage about Wagner’s activities. German-Americans may have received similar information via literary and music

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14 For specific dates and venues of performances featuring Wagner’s music by the Germania Musical Society, see Appendix A: Chronology of Germania Performances in Newman’s *Good Music for a Free People*, especially pp. 226–46. The dates, venues and performing ensembles of the U.S. premieres of Wagnerian excerpts are also compiled in H. Earle Johnson’s *First Performances in America to 1900* (FP).

15 See DJM 2, no. 9 (4 Dec 1852): 69–70.

16 Much has been written on *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, and its significance is evident in its repeated use as a source for scholars of American musical life in the mid- to late nineteenth century. For a thorough examination of the journal’s contents and Dwight’s guiding aesthetic philosophy, see Marcia Wilson Lebow, “A Systematic Examination of the *Journal of Music and Art* Edited by John Sullivan Dwight: 1852–1881, Boston, Massachusetts” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1969).

17 Circulation of *Dwight’s Journal of Music* at its start was around 500, increasing to 2,000 when Oliver Ditson took over as publisher in 1858. In total, *Dwight’s* probably had no more than 750 paid subscribers but Ditson was known to have distributed many complimentary copies; see John Ogasapian and N. Lee Orr, *Music of the Gilded Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 57. No one has yet examined the extent of its circulation outside of Boston yet the Journal is repeatedly regarded as the “leading music journal of the United States” during its existence. This accolade might be attributed to the *Journal’s* longevity, which was considerably longer than most music periodicals from the same period, and the considerable influence Dwight’s views had on American musical taste.
journals published and sent from Germany, if not their own.\textsuperscript{18} Coincidentally, the Germania Society’s premieres of excerpts from \textit{Tannh"{a}user}, \textit{Lohengrin}, and \textit{Rienzi} in Boston followed very closely behind their introduction in Zurich, where Wagner had programmed them for a number of concerts he conducted there in March 1852 and May 1853.\textsuperscript{19} Because of Dwight’s enterprising forethought, Americans were able to read the composer’s accompanying program notes to these excerpts, as well as Liszt’s own essay on \textit{Tannh"{a}user} and analysis of the Overture, in preparation for the Germanians’ Boston performances in the autumn of 1853.\textsuperscript{20} The relative immediacy with which Americans had access to these European sources (as if directly from Wagner himself) in tandem with the Germania concerts was hitherto unprecedented, and was crucial to shaping their early understanding and expectations about his operatic works.

On the local level, American critics focused on reviewing these initial presentations of Wagner’s music by the Germania Musical Society. As Mark McKnight has observed, while these journalists were perhaps less polarized and politicized in their opinions than some of their European counterparts (like in Paris), most of them remained ambivalent or skeptical about Wagnerian opera.\textsuperscript{21} To be sure, they were intrigued by the composer’s revolutionary zeal to reform the operatic art-form and did not hesitate to acknowledge him as an extraordinary creative talent, even a “genius”. To this end, they felt responsible for educating their readers about the basic principles of Wagner’s theories and the main opinions held about them. (This

\begin{itemize}
  \item [18] The reception of Wagner in German-American sources is an area still awaiting research.
  \item [19] These concerts were sponsored by the silk merchant Otto Wesendonck who had recently returned with his wife Mathilde from an extended, and lucrative, residence in the United States. A full list of the excerpts performed is provided by Chris Walton in \textit{Richard Wagner’s Zurich: The Muse of Place} (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), 179.
  \item [20] Wagner’s Zurich program notes have been recently translated and annotated by Thomas S. Grey, for “Wagner Introduces Wagner (and Beethoven): Program Notes Written for Concert Performances by and of Richard Wagner, 1846–1880,” in \textit{Richard Wagner and His World}, 479–520; 496–504. Wagner’s notes to the \textit{Tannh"{a}user} Overture, printed for the Zurich concert of 16 March 1852, were translated and reprinted in DJM 4, no. 3 (22 Oct 1853): 17; explicitly for the Germania Musical Society’s premiere on October 22. The first three parts of Liszt’s 1852 \textit{Tannh"{a}user} essay were reprinted in DJM 4: no. 7 (19 Nov 1853): 49–50; no. 8 (26 Nov 1853): 57–58; and no.9 (3 Dec 1853): 65–66. For further discussion on this version, see David Trippett’s introduction and annotation, “The Overture to \textit{Tannh"{a}user},” in \textit{Richard Wagner and His World}, 251–68.
\end{itemize}
was certainly the view of Dwight, who, as Ora Frishberg Saloman has pointed out, provided Americans with extensive reportage on Wagner in his *Journal of Music*, despite his personal belief that instrumental music would always be superior due to its uniquely transcendent power.) Yet, notwithstanding their relative openness in this vein, many had reservations about Wagner’s notion of the “artwork of the future”, and especially his basic idea of a synthesis of the arts, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which was not well served by the format of concert excerpts alone. Until they could see the composer’s operas realized *in toto* as fully staged presentations, the critics claimed, they struggled to adequately judge the merit of Wagner’s operatic reforms.

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In the autumn of 1854, the Germania Musical Society dissolved, but this development helped to broaden dissemination of Wagner’s music in the U.S. as many of its former members continued to vigorously promote it with other ensembles and in other cities. Some of them stayed in Boston, such as Carl Zerrahn (1826–1909), the Society’s flutist and soloist, who became the conductor of Boston’s Orchestral Union, with which he led the American premiere of the Finale to *Lohengrin* (6 March 1856). Other musicians relocated to cities with prominent German-American populations, especially New York. Julius Unger, a violist, ventured there to take up the position of first Kapellmeister to oversee German opera and theatre at the then-newly built Stadttheater in *Klein Deutschland*. Carl Bergmann eventually settled in New York also, and became the director of the Philharmonic Society; together, they popularized Wagnerian excerpts in their concerts, including giving the first American performance of the *Lohengrin* Prelude in November 1859.

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23 See FP. Zerrahn also became the long-time conductor of the Handel and Haydn Society (1854–1896) and director of the Boston Philharmonic (1857–1863).
24 The Philharmonic Society was not the only ensemble with which Bergmann promoted Wagner excerpts. In fact, he often gave “dry-run” performances of new Wagner extracts in his programs for the City Assembly Rooms, testing them on the predominantly German-immigrant audiences who attended these concerts, before introducing them to the Philharmonic’s more diverse ones. See Matthew Reichert’s essay, “Carl Bergmann...
Wagner meanwhile had learned about the Germania’s performances of his music in Boston, and the interest they generated among Americans. As he wrote to Liszt in January 1854, the news intrigued him but he was quite sure he could not be enticed to go to the United States: “In Boston, they are now even holding Wagner Nights, evening concerts at which nothing but my own compositions are performed. I have been encouraged to go to America; but no one can expect me to tour around giving concerts, not even for a good deal of money!”

However, being vulnerable in his exilic position and saddled with mounting personal debt, Wagner did not necessarily find it easy to turn down the various conducting invitations he received from German-Americans. In December 1858, he was conveyed an attractive prospect to conduct a five-month season of “German ‘Elite-Oper’”, including his own operas, at New York’s Stadttheater. He felt indifferent to the idea at first but it later became more amenable to him, if only because of his precarious personal circumstances (he had been on the lam, having left Zurich for Venice, then ending up in Lucerne in March 1859, after the threat of being extradited to Saxony for his revolutionary activities). In the end, the intended season did not pan out (the Americans had rejected his request to bring the young Karl Klindworth as his “deputy conductor”), about which Wagner was more relieved than upset. As he rationalized to Klindworth in June 1859, “I hope Fate means to spare me the calamity into which I should otherwise probably have been lured by the desire of gain.”

Wagner’s reluctance to leap at this opportunity to oversee the performance of his own works in the U.S. might seem surprising, given that he had been frustrated in the past by the poor productions mounted in various German theatres and elsewhere. Yet evidently, he was still unable to see America (New York, in particular) as anything more than a place to make money.

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27 Letter to Klindworth dated 18 June 1859, in LRW, 57.
for a limited time in order to fund his artistic endeavors in Europe, such as the *Ring* project whose creation was his current priority. On the other hand, he was quite aware that financial gain through conducting was not necessarily guaranteed, as there was a risk in presenting his works to an audience, which in his view, might not—or at least, not yet—be entirely receptive to his operas. His concern was not without foundation, since American audiences at this time had little-to-no experience with a fully-staged Wagner opera.

It was around this time that the first U.S. stagings of *Tannhäuser* did take place, marking a milestone in the early phase of Americans’ reception of the composer’s music. The premiere occurred on April 4, 1859 at New York’s Stadttheater, featuring a cast of German singers, the Arion Society chorus, and an orchestra of forty members led by Carl Bergmann. The limited run of performances (four in total) drew many Americans from within—and outside—the German-immigrant community, and attracted the attention of the city’s English-language press, whose critics comprehensively reviewed them. According to reports, the quality of the production was deemed quite satisfactory, even though journalists in later decades erroneously claimed it was rather poor. Concerning the work itself they were curious about how the opera would sound as an integrated whole, given their previous experience was primarily of orchestral excerpts.

In general, the American press response to *Tannhäuser* in its entirety was mostly ambivalent. The prevailing view was perhaps best represented by William Henry Fry (1818–1864), the music journalist for the *New York Tribune*, one of the city’s leading papers. Fry’s predilection for Italian and French opera colored his assessments of Wagnerian opera. He struggled to embrace Wagner’s concept of melody because it did not align with his opinion that operatic themes should be clearly phrased, beautiful, and memorable. To him, the voice parts sounded like “dreary recitative”, and were “monotonous” and “tedious”, the now-stereotypical

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30 Reprinted in DJM 15, no. 4 (23 April 1859), 27.
adjectives often used to describe the composer’s declamatory style. On the other hand, Fry found Wagner’s instrumental writing strongly compelling. He acknowledged the opera’s “bold, rich and dazzling instrumentation” and was especially moved by the opera’s March and Chorus, which he favorably described as “Rossinian”, and full of noble, dramatic flair. Other critics agreed with this assessment, including the diarist George Templeton Strong, who found Wagner’s orchestration “decidedly impressive”, and enjoyed its “gold instrumental effects”. Dwight also expressed his enthusiasm about the Overture to Tannhäuser, saying it demonstrated Wagner’s “great creative genius in the sphere of instrumental music”. Nevertheless, after witnessing these initial performances, American critics maintained their skepticism about the overall appeal of Wagnerian opera.

Despite the reservations of the American press, the audience at the premiere was reportedly quite receptive to the staging; according to the New York Herald, the performance “elicited the most marked approval from a very critical audience.” The moderately positive reception of both German and Anglo Americans (compared to the hostile response of the Parisian audience for the opera’s 1861 French premiere) might be attributed to the concertizing efforts of conductors like Bergmann, which helped acclimatized them to some of the opera’s music. Still, staged performances of Wagner’s works did not immediately succeed in American cities. Tannhäuser was not presented again until 1864, although the Stadttheater continued to thrive and did not seem to lack the appropriate artistic resources. Neither did Italian companies immediately absorb the work into their repertories, even in translation, as they had done with other German-language operas. It seems then, that to attract a broader American public, Wagner’s operas first had to transcend the physical and social boundaries of the German-language theatre and community. As John Koegel has pointed out, many highbrow non-

Germans like George Templeton Strong, while appreciative of German musical culture, remained aloof from the immigrants and their associated environs, like the Stadttheater. On their path toward general acceptance, Wagner’s works had to infiltrate elite operatic establishments like the Academy of Music, so to provide them with a setting for their presentation more divested of German ethnic associations. Moreover, his music required the advocacy of critics as well as musicians to help guide comprehension and response. Over the next decade or so, such an evolution did gradually take place.

**News from Abroad: The Beginning of the Ring Project**

It was within this initial period of the U.S. performance and reception of Wagner’s music that Americans first learned about his *Ring* project, a cycle of operas based on his reworking of the Scandinavian *Eddas* and *Nibelungenlied* myth. Reports from across the Atlantic were infrequent at first and lacked detail. The earliest tidbit Americans read was a brief announcement in the April 1852 issue of *The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science and Art* that, “The author is living in exile in Switzerland, and is engaged upon a dramatic trilogy with a prelude.” A year later, a slightly more informative notice appeared in *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, stating that “Richard Wagner has promised an opera, or rather a series of three operas connected together, upon the subject of the “Death of Siegfried” and the “Vengeance of Brünnhilde” – a performance requiring three evenings.” (The report, for whatever reason, neglected to mention the “prelude”.) This latter communication was likely derived from Wagner’s essay, *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde (A Communication to My Friends)*, published in autumn 1851, in which he formally announced his projected creation of the operatic cycle, and his plans to have the complete work presented over four evenings, at a

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33 In his diary, Strong wrote disparagingly of the theatre, describing it as the “little, dingy, sour-smelling Bowery Stadttheater.” See Koegel’s thorough discussion of Strong’s response to the U.S. premiere of *Tannhäuser* in *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 36–38.

34 *The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science and Art* (1 Apr 1852): 552. It was a short-lived New York-based music journal, published between 1850 and 1852.

35 DJM 3, no. 3 (23 Apr 1853): 20.
“specially appointed” festival. While this report might have piqued Americans’ curiosity, neither English- nor German-American-language periodicals appeared to have picked up sufficient information on Wagner’s progress on the Ring to generate further discussion.

By this time, Wagner had completed the entire poem to the Ring cycle and had fifty copies privately printed and distributed to friends. In February 1853, he read the text over four consecutive evenings to an invited audience at the Hotel Baur au Lac in Zurich. This private printing did not come to the attention of Americans until 1855, the next occasion a report of substance about the Ring project was published in an American paper. The news appeared in March in the New York journal Musical Gazette (and subsequently reprinted in the New York Times and the notable New York weekly, The Albion.) As the journalist relayed to his readers:

At present, [Wagner] is engaged upon the composition of a tetralogy, in which the most prominent of the legends of the Edda are worked up in a dramatic form. The four connected dramas are, “Rheingold,” “die Walküre,” “der junge Siegfried,” (the young Siegfried), and “Siegfrieds Tod,” (the death of Siegfried). Wagner had already finished the last-named poem in 1849, and it was printed in the Spring of 1853. But only for his friends and acquaintances. In the Autumn of 1853, he commenced the composition of “Rheingold,” which was completed in the Spring of 1854. The “Walküre” is at present about half ready. The whole (the four dramas together) have the title, “The Ring of the Nibelungen.”

Although the cycle was only half completed, the Gazette’s critic seemed to think it already appropriate to comment on it. Americans, he believed, would be interested in the Nibelungen myths, but he was skeptical that the entire work, should it be staged, would actually attract the public at large because of its enormous scale:

What the result and fate of all this will be, lies concealed in the future. But as Wagner himself makes it a sine qua non that these dramas are to be performed on three consecutive evenings, it is not difficult to anticipate but little sympathy from the public from these new inspirations, even if curiosity should attract them to see the old song of the Nibelungen put upon the stage.

While this would not be the Ring’s fate in the U.S., we might consider how this report shaped Americans’ earliest notions about the cycle. At the very least, they would have gleaned that it

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would be an operatic work of unprecedented length and complexity—perhaps even profundity—as it would embody the revolutionary principles Wagner had envisioned for the genre in his writings. But beyond these abstract concepts, they otherwise learned very little about the Ring's text or music. Following the Gazette article, it appears communications about the cycle halted for several years.

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No further news about the Ring project reached Americans until January 1863, when the first musical excerpts from the cycle were performed in Vienna. By this time, Wagner had completed the full scores to Das Rheingold and Die Walküre as well as two-thirds of Siegfried, when his progress was interrupted in 1857 in favor of a new project, Tristan und Isolde. He was soon preoccupied with getting his newest work staged, but two attempts to mount its premiere, first in Karlsruhe in 1861 and then at the Vienna Hofoper in 1862, both failed to come to fruition. Now even deeper in debt, yet not wanting to disappoint his small but growing number of Viennese supporters, Wagner decided to direct a series of three concerts at the Theatre an der Wien between December 1862 and January 1863, to replace the aborted Tristan staging.

Unlike previous concerts he conducted for which he programmed excerpts from his already-completed operas, Wagner chose instead to publicly introduce musical excerpts from the first three operas of the Ring cycle though its composition was not yet complete. For this reason, the Vienna concerts are a landmark event in the performance and reception “pre-history” of the cycle. For Americans, the reports made available to them about these performances were probably the first time they learned anything specific about the plot and the music of the work.

The first concert took place on December 26, 1862, with a program divided into three parts. It began with the Prelude, “Pogner’s Address”, and “The Gathering of the Mastersingers” from Die Meistersinger, another work-in-progress; then proceeded with “The Ride of the

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37 The reception of Wagner’s music in Vienna during the 1850s and 60s, and thus the context for these concerts, has been previously examined by Hubert Kolland, in Die kontroverse Rezeption von Wagners Nibelungen-Ring, 1850–70 (Cologne: Studio Verl. Schwe, 1995), 64–67.
Valkyries”, “Siegmond’s Spring Song”, and “Wotan’s Farewell” (in that order) from Die Walküre; and closed with “The Robbery of the Rhinegold” (i.e. the second part of the first scene), and “The Entry of the Gods into Valhalla” from Das Rheingold. All selections were performed with singers except the Meistersinger Prelude, “The Gathering of the Mastersingers”, and “The Ride of the Valkyries”, which featured only the orchestra. The program was repeated in full on January 1, 1863, but modified for the third concert on the 11th: the Meistersinger Prelude was replaced with the Faust Overture, and the Overture to Tannháuser and the “Forging Songs” from the first act of Siegfried were given in lieu of the Rheingold excerpts. Wagner seemed to have made the alteration to draw a larger audience, as the Tannhäuser Overture was already familiar to many Viennese, and the Rheingold selections had not been well-received by the press. A large portion of the audience—comprised mostly of aristocrats, dignitaries, and students—responded with enthusiasm to the concerts, granting Wagner many ovations and accolades. However, the public’s affirmation was not reflected in the European press, which expressed deep skepticism, even hostility to the composer’s latest offerings.

Some of this feedback made its way to Americans, including through three substantial articles reprinted from European papers in the February and March 1863 issues of Dwight’s Journal of Music. One was the London Musical World’s translation of Wagner’s own explanatory program notes to each of the Ring excerpts that were distributed for the December 26 concert. These texts are essentially picturesque descriptions of the scenic and dramatic context that preface each musical extract. I have transcribed here as examples the notes for Das Rheingold (as originally reprinted in Dwight’s Journal of Music) since they were not included with Thomas Grey’s recent English translation of the composer’s notes to the Die Walküre excerpts. The following narrative paraphrase served to introduce “The Robbery of the

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38 Further details about these arrangements are discussed in WWV, 412–17.
39 Kolland offers a detailed analysis of the Viennese reception to the 1862–63 concerts in Die kontroverse Rezepction, 68–91.
40 DJM 22, no. 23 (7 Mar 1863): 388–89.
41 See “Wagner Introduces Wagner,” in Richard Wagner and His World, 513–15. Grey attributes these notes to the
Rhinegold”:

On the jagged and rocky bottom of the Rhine, joyously darting, like fishes, hither and thither, played the three Rhine-Daughters, who were accustomed to assemble here to watch the costly treasure. The Nibelung Alberich, a dwarfish, demoniacal being, whose home was in the deep layers of the earth, forced his way out of the caverns, gazed upon the sport of the maidens, and soon burst forth into burning and amorous yearning. Turning from one maiden to the other, at first encouraged and then scornfully left by each, teased, ridiculed, and avoided by all, he stops, foaming with rage and breathless, after having in vain climbed here and there after the madcap girls, and shakes his fist menacingly at them. In this position he remains, with his gaze directed upwards, and is attracted and captivated by the following sight:

“Through the flood, something growing lighter and lighter had penetrated from above. It gradually settles upon a high place on the middle of the bank of rocks, and becomes a dazzling, brightly-beaming gold-splendor; magically golden light breaks from it and pierces the water.” – Here begins the song.

A more general depiction of events summarized the dramatic situation leading up to the “Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla”:

The ring which Alberich had forged himself out of the Rhinegold, has, together with the treasure the Nibelung gained by the aid of this powerful hoop, been given by Wotan, after he tore them both from Alberich, to the giant brothers, Fasolt and Fafner, as their payment for building the castle of the Gods, which is now completed. A quarrel immediately sprang up between the brothers for the possession of the ring. Struck down by Fafner, Fasolt sank dead upon the ground. The Gods are astounded; Wotan acknowledges the power of the curse which Alberich has attached to the ring of which he was forcibly deprived. Donner, displeased, points to the background enveloped in fog, and, in virtue of his divine office, prepares to dissolve the curse: -- Here commences the song.

These program notes offered many Europeans and Americans their first glimpse of the Ring’s narrative as Wagner had conceived it, since the complete poem was not published and issued to the public until several months after these concerts. Yet, unlike the annotations he wrote for later concerts featuring excerpts from the cycle, these notes rarely included stage directions or cues taken from the libretto’s text. One exception was Wagner’s notes accompanying “The Robbery of the Rhinegold”, in which he directly quoted his stage directions from the score at the point of the gold’s “awakening” (see above). Few, if any, readers at the

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time would have known the provenance of this quotation, but it was an evocative detail from the opera that also hinted at what Wagner envisioned for its future staging.

The other two articles on the Vienna concerts that appeared in Dwight’s were translated from the Cologne-based Niederheinische Musik-Zeitung and the Vienna newspaper, Die Presse. These responses to the newly unveiled excerpts from the Ring exposed Americans to some of the key topics of criticism regarding the latest evolution in Wagnerian opera. One main charge these critics made against Wagner was they thought the composer a hypocrite for already publicly introducing the cycle as musical fragments, rather than the complete work he claimed would exemplify his aesthetic concept of Gesamtkunstwerk. As the journalist for the Musik-Zeitung complained:

[Wagner] has managed to surround himself with a nimbus, which so blinds people, that they do not notice, or, if they do, they pardon, in him, the most glaring contradictions to his own aesthetical principles; for what can be more opposed to his system of Poetry-Music and Drama of the Future, than the plan of giving detached pieces from operas, whereby all the connection of the poem is destroyed, while the music can be regarded only as music, in direct contradiction to his own doctrine?

The Die Presse critic was similarly frustrated and wondered how these selections fit in with the rest of the cycle. Noting the particular dramatic intensity of these excerpts, he felt their musical value could only be determined in how they would be experienced within the context of the entire work:

The fragments presented by Wagner cannot possibly be appreciated as such, according to their worth and signification. Even in point of purely musical effect they must appear quite differently in their connection with the whole; they certainly are better or worse, than they appear to us singly in the concert. Better, if all that goes before them in the opera prepares for them, if they are climaxes, before and after which the hearer’s nerves find rest. Worse, if their style is that of the whole opera, and if this tries to make daily bread of that which only serves for a rare stimulus.

On the musical content of the excerpts, however, this reviewer was more moderate than other members of the Viennese press. To his readers, he explained that the music of the Ring

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cycle was a “positive advancement” from *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, specifically, in what he described as the “descriptive, graphic tendency, the dramatic dependency of the music.” As he elaborated, “In the technical part of this now masterly scene-painting Wagner has made decided progress. The effective orchestral pictures in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* grow pale before the glowing colors of the *Nibelungen* scenes.” Even so, he thought that these “musical scene paintings” were almost *too* literal; that in Wagner’s desire to have music serve the drama, true “musical invention and development” were sacrificed (in this sense, the critic revealed his own bias that non-programmatic music was superior.) Yet he could not deny the overwhelming power of the excerpts he heard, if only because of Wagner’s evocative orchestral effects, as realized by the large instrumental forces the composer had at hand. His description of this aspect gave Americans their first inkling of the distinctive sound-world of the *Ring* that they could anticipate hearing in the future:

In each of these Wagner fragments peculiar, and at the same time dazzling, orchestra effects strike upon the surprised ear of the listener. Indeed Wagner continually employs boundless materials for this end; the entire orchestra (strengthened too) kept in incessant billowy motion; string and wind instruments in the strangest combinations; trombones and bombardons, roll of kettle drums, bass drums, cymbals, triangles, bells. In the refinement of unusual tone-mixtures, as well as in weight of material noise, Wagner seems to us have reached the point, beyond which he can go no further.

Ultimately, the critic of *Die Presse* remained deeply skeptical that Wagner’s *Ring* would ever broadly appeal to audiences because its dramatic and musical innovations demanded so much from them. He especially doubted that they would be sympathetic to a series of dramas that involved mythological characters rather than human beings. Nor did he think they would ever desire to consume explanatory books about the work which were already appearing in circulation, such as Franz Müller’s astonishingly lengthy study on the composer’s introduction to the recently published *Ring* poem.44 Above all, the critic believed that Wagner was striving for “unfruitful spheres” in trying to realize on-stage the visual world of the cycle’s operas. He

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44 Entitled *Der Ring des Nibelungen, eine Studie zur Einführung in die gleichnamige Dichtung Richard Wagners*
struggled to fathom:

How the scenic representation of the *Nibelungen Ring* is to be made possible; how Wagner is going to represent the Ride of the Valkyraes, the fire charm, the contest with the fire-spitting and at the same time the singing and speaking dragon; how he is to manage the scenes in the Walhalla and in the depths of the Rhine....

Perhaps Wagner would be better off to focus his efforts on *Die Meistersinger*, the critic ventured, with its “easily understandable and easily representable *Minnesinger*”, as the future of German art. If the composer wanted the cycle to succeed at all, the journalist “feared” it would require “a generation of singers and listeners different from the present kind.”

Exactly what Americans thought of the foreign assessments of the Vienna concerts made available in *Dwight’s Journal of Music* is not known; neither Dwight nor any other American critic appears to have commented on the articles. Presumably, those interested were intrigued by what they read, but having little or no direct knowledge of the music, they were probably not much affected by the misgivings expressed by the European journalists. At the very least, Wagner’s program notes to the *Ring* excerpts and the reviews helped to advance a bit further their knowledge of the musical and dramatic content of the cycle. Otherwise, unfortunately for Americans, their distance from Europe limited their access to some of the sources on the *Ring* which were being circulated at this time. Among these publications was the complete (though not definitive) text of the *Ring* poem; produced several months after the Vienna concerts in 1863, it included a preface that outlined the particular conditions under which Wagner wished the cycle to be performed, along with a plea for a patron who could support him in his endeavor.\(^{45}\) Piano-score editions of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* created by the composer’s friend, Karl Klindworth, were also publicly released in 1861 and 1865, respectively.\(^{46}\) Wagner sought as well to capitalize on the enthusiastic response of the Viennese

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\(^{46}\) Published as *Das Rheingold von Richard Wagner. Vollständiger Klavierauszug von Karl Klindworth. Eigentum (Leipzig: G. Heinze, 1862).* Müller’s book was the first publication about the *Ring* outside of Wagner’s own writings. The German reception of this text is discussed by Kolland in *Die kontroverse Rezeption*, 29–41.
audience to his arrangements; by the second concert, he had already alerted his publisher, Schott, to the “money-making” possibilities of “The Ride of the Valkyries” and “Sieg mund’s Spring Song” in transcription. Yet, few, if any, copies of the text or scores seemed to have reached U.S. shores, as American critics did not readily discuss them in print nor did musicians appear to have attempted even private performances. Even if the scores were available, the complexity of Klindworth’s reductions would have been beyond the abilities of most amateur pianists.

Following the Vienna concerts, Americans received no further updates about the Ring until the end of the 1860s, when Wagner finally resumed work on the cycle. Although the composer went on to introduce the same selections to audiences in Prague, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Pest, Karlsruhe, Breslau, and Munich, Americans would have to wait almost another decade before they heard the first selections from Die Walküre performed in their cities. Yet, during this period, American interest in Wagner’s music entered a second phase of growth, as conductors like Theodore Thomas sought to foster its appreciation through their vigorous dissemination of excerpts from the composer’s operas in the concert hall. The rise in concerts featuring these extracts also affected a parallel surge in press attention, as well as encouraged impresarios to stage his works at the elite opera houses of New York and Chicago, beyond the bounds of their German-American communities. These developments were crucial to broadening American awareness of, and establishing their familiarity with, the Wagnerian aesthetic, and thus, would later affect their future response to the Ring cycle.

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47 As he wrote to Schott on 8 January 1863, “Two of them, “The Ride of the Valkyries” and Siegmund’s Spring Song,” were so uncommonly popular that I am to repeat them in the third concert, and a desire has arisen to put transcriptions of them in the hands of the public.” He also gave Schott right of first refusal to publish Karl Tausig’s piano paraphrases of these excerpts, which he believed would also be “very popular with the public”. In LRW, 166–69.

Part II: 1863–1870

Wagner’s Music in the American Concert Hall and Theatre

The cultivation of a new generation of listeners for Wagner’s operas achieved new momentum in the 1860s as excerpts from his completed works were introduced and performed with increasing frequency in concert halls across the United States. Americans in New York, Boston, and Chicago were the first to hear new arrangements, performed by various enterprising conductors and ensembles. Carl Zerrahn and the Philharmonic Orchestra gave the Prelude to Lohengrin its Boston premiere at the Music Hall on January 14, 1860. At Chicago’s Bryan Hall, Hans Balatka and the Philharmonic Society performed there for the first time there the “Procession of Brides and Bridesmaids” from Lohengrin, as well as the Overture of Rienzi (on 23 December 1861 and 28 December 1864, respectively). But during this decade, the most influential and dominant promoter of Wagner’s music was the German-American conductor Theodore Thomas.

As has been documented in several studies, Theodore Thomas (1835–1905) was a central figure in the development of late-nineteenth-century American concert life. Born in Essen, he arrived in New York in 1845, and later connected with Carl Bergmann, who invited him to play as a solo violinist with the Germania Musical Society. When the Germania disbanded and Bergmann became the conductor of the Philharmonic Society, Thomas joined him as the orchestra’s concertmaster. Thomas’s first contact with Wagner’s music was thus through working with Bergmann while the latter was introducing the first selections from Tannhäuser and Lohengrin to the American public. Their mutual desire to promote the composer’s works also extended to their activities as chamber musicians. With pianist William

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49 See FP.
50 The most recent and comprehensive study of Thomas’s life and career is Ezra Schabas’s Theodore Thomas: America’s Conductor and Builder of Orchestras, 1835–1905 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Thomas himself wrote an invaluable two-volume autobiography (TMA); Vol. I is entitled “Life Work”; Vol. 2, ed. George P. Upton, contains a comprehensive selection of the programs he conducted. After his death, his wife Rose Fay Thomas, wrote and published Memoirs of Theodore Thomas (MTT); a companion index to this book was compiled by Dena J. and Morton Epstein, entitled the Index to Memoirs of Theodore Thomas by Rose Fay Thomas, 1911 (Chicago: Chicago Symphony Orchestra Archives, 1997).
Mason, Thomas and Bergmann (who played cello) created a successful chamber music series at New York’s Dodworth’s Rooms, of which Wagner’s music was a part from the beginning: the program for their first concert on November 27, 1855, included an arrangement of “O du mein holder Abendstern” from Tannhäuser.\(^{51}\) In 1862 Thomas founded his own eponymous orchestra, and immediately adopted Wagnerian excerpts into the ensemble’s core repertory. The opening selection for their debut concert in May was the Overture to Der fliegende Holländer, an American premiere. From that moment on and for the rest of his career, Thomas was a tireless disseminator of the composer’s music with every orchestra he directed.\(^{52}\)

Thomas’s extensive concertizing activities were, in part, characterized by his broader mission to educate and elevate Americans’ musical tastes. To this end, he experimented with the programming of his concerts, seeking to move beyond the eclectic “potpourri” concerts containing the lighter, popular repertory (i.e. marches, dance music, overtures, and Italian opera arias), towards offering weightier fare, such as entire symphonies by the European masters. Thomas appropriated Wagner’s music to help foster this shift; he incorporated extracts from the composer’s operas in his “serious” programs, as well as concerts in less formal settings, like the popular summer series at New York’s Central Park Garden.

Thomas’s advocacy for Wagner’s music in the American context stemmed from his conviction that the composer’s operas exemplified the future direction of music. He saw Wagner as the next step in the evolution of the Austro-Germanic tradition, which he considered to begin with Bach and Handel, continuing through Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. Believing that American audiences needed to learn to appreciate this repertory as part of their cultural education, Thomas explicitly highlighted this connection for them through the manner he often constructed his concert programs in which Wagner excerpts were featured. The link between

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52 Thomas directed many significant orchestral ensembles during his lifetime, including: the Theodore Thomas Orchestra (1862–1878); the Brooklyn Philharmonic (1862–1891); the New York Philharmonic Society (1877–1891); and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (1891–1905).
Beethoven and Wagner was especially reinforced. In his *Musical Autobiography*, Thomas outlined his unique method of creating programs, and revealed that he used the music of both composers as his “pillars” to initially determine the concert’s structure and shape its flow. Typically, he stated, “[Beethoven’s] place was always in the first part of the program”, because the composer “has reached the highest pinnacle in instrumental music”, and that his music “gives delight to the educated, and teaches the uneducated.” Wagner excerpts generally formed the “climax”, as he described it, being placed near the end of a concert, since this music “excites his hearers, especially the younger generation, and interests the less musical.” Thomas’s mixed programs sometimes incorporated two to three selections by Wagner, and on several occasions, he conducted “Wagner Night” concerts that were comprised entirely (or nearly so) of selections from the composer’s operas.

Americans in general received Thomas’s initial efforts to promote Wagner’s music with curiosity and interest. It helped that Thomas was particularly successful at being the first conductor (or among the first) to secure selections from the composer’s freshest works as they were being introduced to the European public. He was responsible for giving the first American performances (in New York) of the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* (10 February 1866), and the Overture to *Die Meistersinger* (20 October 1866). These initial presentations occurred within the years surrounding the operas’ staged premieres in Munich (*Tristan* on 10 June 1865; *Die Meistersinger* on 21 June 1868) under the auspices of Wagner’s new young royal sponsor, King Ludwig II of Bavaria. Americans were able to read a sampling of European reviews of both events in periodicals such as *Dwight’s Journal of Music* but it was Thomas’s concerts that gave them a concrete, albeit still limited, experience of Wagner’s newest projects.\(^\text{54}\)

Along with conductors and orchestras, touring soli virtuosi also capitalized on the growing American interest in Wagner by incorporating transcriptions of orchestral excerpts in

\(^{53}\) TMA 2, 16.

their recital programs. In 1859 pianist Sebastian Bach Mills performed the March from *Tannhäuser* in his debut with the New York Philharmonic Society. Some even used innovative ploys to excite American audiences for Wagner’s music. One notable example is the wildly popular American pianist and composer, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, who preferred to make a truly visual spectacle out of his Wagner arrangements. His most audacious endeavor was his arrangement of the same March from *Tannhäuser* for an astounding fourteen pianos! According to Gottschalk’s diary, while on a concert tour in 1865, the work was so successful at its premiere that he “had to announce another concert on fourteen pianos.” As he described it, the opening of the performance was carefully choreographed to produce the maximum theatrical impact:

> Before going on the stage, I made my thirteen acolytes take notice, that, in order to produce the greatest effect, it was indispensable not to make any preludes, [so] that the public might be more surprised on hearing all at once the fourteen pianos attack the flourish of trumpets with which the March in *Tannhäuser* commences.\(^{55}\)

It is worth noting that this performance took place while Gottschalk was on tour in California, thus indicating that even Americans on the west coast, far from the “Wagner center” of New York, were also being exposed to Wagner’s music.

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While Thomas and others promoted Wagner and German symphonic music in the American concert hall, German opera also received a boost in public attention. In New York, it also benefitted from a new theatre. In 1864, the “Neue” Stadttheater, replacing the venue from a decade ago, opened in a new and larger building in the Bowery with Carl Anschütz’s German company in residence.\(^{56}\) From its first season, the troupe established a strong reputation, giving over one hundred presentations of exclusively German-language operas, including established works such as *Der Freischütz*, *Fidelio*, and Flotow’s *Martha*, as well as novelties like Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Albert Lortzing’s *Zar und Zimmermann* and *Der Wildschütz*.


\(^{56}\) Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 44–53.
This repertory was later expanded to include German translations of French operas by Adolphe Adam, Daniel Auber, Etienne-Nicolas Méhul, and François-Adrien Boieldieu. As these operas were given less frequently at other theatres, their presentation at the Stadttheater attracted many opera-going Americans seeking fresh alternatives to the Italian repertoire that was dominating many theatres, including elite houses like the Academy of Music. Eventually, to help inject novelty and draw larger and more diverse audiences to the Academy, German troupes began to be invited there to give regular seasons. In the spring of 1863, Anschütz became the first conductor to secure a lease there, as well as at the Academy of Music in Brooklyn, thus giving his company and their repertory exposure to a broader public beyond the German-immigrant community. In turn, their performances at these venues attracted greater attention from critics of English-American newspapers. Anschütz's initiative, therefore, helped to raise the general American interest in German-language opera during this period.

Importantly, Anschütz facilitated the entry of Wagner's works into these Italian-opera-dominated environments. On January 18, 1864, the Anschütz company presented the second U.S. production of *Tannhäuser*, but significantly, its *first* presentation at New York's Academy of Music (repeat performances followed on the 20th and 22nd). Printed advertisements promised a visual spectacle, especially the Procession scene of the second act, which was anticipated to be of “unusual splendor, new costumes, appointments, etc.” Carl Bergmann, who conducted the 1859 premiere, was called upon again to direct the orchestra and a mixed cast of German and Italian singers who all sang in German; the chorus was once more reinforced by members of the Arion Society. According to press reports, it was a creditable production; some thought it a considerable improvement from the opera’s first staging five years earlier, and the performances were attended by large and appreciative audiences. Encouraged by this positive response,

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57 John Graziano has noted that during this decade, American theatres primarily performed operas from a core repertory consisting of twelve works each by Verdi and Donizetti and six by Meyerbeer. See his overview of the repertoire of this period, in “An Opera for Every Taste: The New York Scene, 1862–1869,” in European Music and Musicians in New York City, 253–72.

58 This was probably the Dresden version of the opera from 1845, not the revised edition given in Paris in 1861.
Anschütz partnered with Leonard Grover’s German opera company a year later, to bring German-language opera to Americans in various cities, including Washington DC, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. On one tour, Grover’s troupe succeeded -in presenting *Tannhäuser*—albeit a severely truncated adaptation of the 1845 version—in Chicago for the first time, at McVicker’s Theatre. Yet, despite attracting increasing interest from American audiences for these performances, fully-staged presentations of Wagner’s works halted once again, with none occurring until 1870. While there are no clear reasons for this gap, it might be concluded that staging Wagner operas was still an artistic and financial risk that many impresarios were wary of undertaking, especially given that the American press at this time still had reservations about its appeal.

**American Critics on Wagner in the 1860s**

As Wagner’s music was being popularized in concerts during the 1860s, music critics were beginning to achieve valid professional status, with music criticism developing into a robust and dynamic industry in larger American cities. Significantly, major newspapers began to employ dedicated music critics. These papers included New York’s three main English-language dailies, the *Tribune*, *Herald*, and the *Times*, as well as the German-language *Staats-Zeitung*; Boston’s *Daily Advertiser*, and Chicago’s *Daily Tribune*. Within these broadsheets, printed commentary about Wagner consisted primarily of reviews of orchestral concerts that contained excerpts from his operas.

Even with the growing number of performances of the composer’s music, the tenor of Wagner criticism during the 1860s did not shift considerably from the previous decade. Regarding the new excerpts from *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, American journalists maintained their critical distance, and were quite unsympathetic towards the advanced Wagnerian aesthetic

59 Koegel, *Music in German-Immigrant Theater*, 55–56. Grover’s was the first German company of any significance to perform in the mid-western city; see Robert Marsh, *One Hundred and Forty Years of Opera in Chicago* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, 2006). Grover’s company performed this version of *Tannhäuser* again at New York’s Olympic Theatre in February 1867; see McKnight, “Wagner and New York Press,” 148.
exhibited in these works. The critic of the *New York Times*, for example, judged the *Tristan* Prelude to be “absolutely without significance”, for “the thing is unintelligible to the eye and unmeaning to the ear.” Although he gives few specific reasons to explain his assessment, the critic seemed most unsettled by the excerpt’s apparent “formlessness”, complaining it lacked a definite—or at least, a recognizable—structure. He also seemed troubled by the obviously sensuous nature of the music, as he hinted that the Prelude exhibited a new state of decadence; he added that Wagner had gone too far in his “pretentiousness, and that tendency to over-elaboration which always precedes decay.” The reviewer concluded that “Stripped of orchestral color it would exhibit mere puerility….No people could be expected to stand it.” Yet a repeat performance on March 10 by Thomas and the Philharmonic Society led the critic to revise his opinion somewhat. This time, an improved interpretation apparently made the Prelude more comprehensible; as he wrote: “The two harmonic changes were marked with clearness, and the great technical skill of the composer, was amply illustrated. We have never heard this piece better played—and we speak with recollections of a Vienna orchestra, which was considered perfect.” Nevertheless, he noted that the well-executed performance did not erase his initial objections about the music itself.

The Overture to *Die Meistersinger*, premiered at New York’s Irving Hall at one of Thomas’s symphonic soirées, was also negatively reviewed by the city’s critics. The *Tribune’s* reporter scathingly described the music as full of “incoherence and confusion”, and that it was “neither healthy nor elevating, and we regret to see it occupying a place in our classical programs.” He blamed the incomprehensibility of the excerpt partly on Thomas’s interpretation, commenting with disappointment that the conductor “failed to render it intelligible.” The critic of the *Times* utilized much of his column space to characterize Wagner as a “mad genius” who created bombastic music that saturated the ear to exhaustion and

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60 *New York Times*, 12 Feb 1866, 5.
boredom. While he could not deny the composer’s talent, he found the music of the Overture disturbingly overwrought and perplexing. As he described it:

The opening part has evidently been written with the mild purpose of being insane….The score of this part is regular in appearance, but to the ear it is a succession of diabolical dissonances—a sort of Stygian march of chords where everything that follows must perforce be more or less Elysian. And indeed the elaboration of the last part, where three subjects are wrought together with skill, is interesting and eminently effective. There is too much of it, however….His coloring is as gorgeous as the war-paint of a wild Indian, and it is laid on much in the same way.63

Evidently, these journalists (and probably not just a few other Americans) struggled with this most recent evolution of the Wagnerian aesthetic—notably, the “continuous” music that seemed without resolution, piquant harmonies, formal structure that defied easy analysis—as exemplified in the Tristan and Meistersinger excerpts. On the other hand, one effect of their latest experience was it somewhat modified their previous opinions about Wagner’s earlier works, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin, towards a more favorable response. Regarding the 1864 revival of Tannhäuser, the critics of the Chicago Daily Tribune and the New York Times openly praised some of the opera’s pioneering features (William Fry of the New York Tribune, though, maintained his initial criticisms from the work’s first U.S. staging in 1859.)64 The Chicagoan George P. Upton thought Wagner to be a “genius”, as evident by the composer’s key “innovations on the old forms.” These he methodically explained to his readers, highlighting especially the principle of Gesamtkunstwerk, the marriage of poetry and music, and Wagner’s expansive treatment of tonal harmony and modulation.65 Charles Seymour of the Times also approved of the concept of Gesamtkunswerk as an important reform for the operatic genre. Furthermore, he defended nearly all musical aspects of the opera. Wagner, he wrote, “never despises a melody but nurses it carefully and artistically”, citing Tannhäuser’s “love song” to Venus and Wolfram’s solos in the first and third acts as notable examples. Concerning

64 See reviews in New York Tribune, 19 Jan 1864, 8; Chicago Daily Tribune, 14 Jan 1865, 4; and New York Times, 21 Jan 1864, 4.
65 George P. Upton (1834–1919) was the Chicago Daily Tribune’s chief music critic from 1863 to 1881.
Wagner’s harmonic language, he carefully noted that even if certain modulations sounded “abrupt and harsh,” or “extravagant” at times, they were “not always disagreeable to the ear.”

Most compelling to Seymour was the composer’s orchestral writing, which he felt made Wagner the rightful successor to the venerated Germanic tradition of orchestral music.

Although still restrained, the largely affirmative tone of Upton and Seymour’s reviews indicates a subtle shift in the general tone of American Wagner criticism at this time: from skepticism and ambivalence, towards appreciation and even advocacy. Seymour’s perspective appears to have been shaped in part by his observations of a more receptive American audience at the 1864 performances, compared to the 1859 premiere. This development he attributed to Americans’ greater familiarity with the composer’s music, through their increased exposure to Wagnerian excerpts in the concert hall. As he commented,

[They have] become familiar with the overture, and through that brilliant potpourri, with the principal themes of the opera. The advantage of this acquaintance was noticeable last night in frequent and genial bursts of applause. Indeed, we have seldom seen an audience that was more attentive, respectful, and quick to appreciate.

In noting this evolution, Seymour intimated that critics should not overlook the value of Wagner’s music in cultivating American audiences, in spite of their own reservations about his operas. In fact, as he observed, the dissemination of Wagner’s music in the concert hall already showed positive results, in that the Americans at the Tannhäuser performances did not respond with the “obstinate blindness” that inflicted the Parisians in 1861. It was thus in this way that the cultivation of Wagnerian opera and the fostering of its appreciation in the U.S. became linked to the idea of national cultural progress. In the following decade, this powerful notion would be appropriated by a new generation of American critics who would bring about a major shift of opinion on the composer’s works and aesthetic theories, and would eventually be crucial to the evolution of American support for Wagner’s Ring project.

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Along with newspaper reviews of concert performances of opera excerpts and the
occasional staging, Wagner’s music and theories continued to be subjects of periodic discussion in American music and literary journals during the 1860s. Boston, New York, and now Chicago, circulated a variety of such publications, each containing a mixture of musical analysis, criticism, and accounts about cultural developments locally, nationally, and abroad. Among them, Dwight’s Journal of Music continued to be a key source of foreign reports about Wagner. Throughout this period, Dwight kept his readers abreast of the European reception of the composer’s writings and music. He translated and reprinted several lengthy articles from European journals, including German conductor and composer Ferdinand Hiller’s deliberations on “the Music of the Future”, and a comprehensive survey of the composer’s operas completed to date by French music critic Edouard Schuré. Not one to shy away from controversial topics, Dwight also devoted substantial column space to several (European) responses to Wagner’s 1869 republication of his notorious essay, Das Judenthum in der Musik. Remarkably, the piece was largely ignored by American newspapers and other periodicals.

It is noteworthy that while American newspaper critics were gradually becoming more receptive to Wagner’s music, Dwight grew more ambivalent. At this time, the editor showed himself to be in growing sympathy with well-known European Wagner skeptics such as Hiller and Eduard Hanslick by choosing to publish their criticisms over those by the composer’s supporters. Aware that he might be accused of bias, Dwight openly justified his preference for reprinting the reviews of critics like Hanslick, for their ability to write “more intelligently and more sensibly” (i.e. with more critical distance) than others. As his Journal’s editor, he perhaps felt himself responsible to be a tempering force, keeping in check Americans who seemed increasingly inclined to blindly champion Wagner's operas when their merits as “total works of art” still had to be proved. On the other hand, Dwight might well have been restricted to

For example, see W.S.B. Mathews’ Chicago-based monthly, The Musical Independent, which according to James Deaville, contains the fullest and most authoritative view of musical developments in Chicago between 1868 and 1873. See Deaville’s article, “The Origins of Music Journalism in Chicago: Criticism as a Reflection of Musical Life,” in American Musical Life in Context and Practice to 1865, 231–64.

See Briggs’s analysis of the shifts in Dwight’s perceptions on Wagner’s music over the decades of the Journal’s existence, in Chapters 5 and 6 of “Richard Wagner and American Music-Literary Activity from 1850 to 1920.”
whatever foreign reviews were made available to him. On these occasions, such limitations inevitably resulted in an incomplete, if not one-sided, assessment.

**Foreign Reports on the Munich Premieres of Das Rheingold and Die Walküre**

After a gap of six years, the next occasion that Americans appeared to have received fresh information about Wagner’s *Ring* cycle concerned the world premieres of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* in 1869 and 1870, respectively, at Munich’s court opera house. *Dwight’s Journal of Music* was one of a very few—if not the only—U.S. source to convey any information to Americans about these performances of the first two operas of the cycle. What they learned about them was quite limited. Although the performances drew many of Europe’s musical glitterati as well as journalists, Americans did not (or perhaps, could not) directly participate, nor were U.S. correspondents present to cover the events. Curiously, on this occasion too, the American media had little-to-no access to foreign reports to reprint. Even Dwight seemed to have difficulty procuring published reviews for his journal, though he was able to obtain some informal correspondence about the premieres to share with his readers.

Perhaps it was just as well for Wagner that Americans found out relatively little about these first presentations of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, for their circumstances were far from his ideal. He was adamant that a proper staging of the *Ring* would not be had until the cycle was complete and the desired festival conditions fulfilled. However, due to pressure from his royal benefactor Ludwig II, who owned the scores to the operas, Wagner had (very reluctantly) allowed the king to mount them at the court opera house, provided renovations were made to its stage machinery. Meanwhile, conflict over political matters and Wagner’s affair with Cosima von Bülow forced the composer to relocate to a villa in Tribschen (near Lucerne), thus making him unable to directly supervise the rehearsals in Munich. Deeply concerned that his

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inability to participate would result in a disastrous performance, Wagner attempted to persuade Ludwig to halt his plans to mount Das Rheingold but to no avail. He then tried to have members of the production team and a few specially selected singers consult him regularly at Tribschen; problems ensued which ultimately forced the withdrawal of some of them, including the conductor Hans Richter, not long before the premiere. Ludwig remained undeterred and simply filled the positions with members of his court’s resident company, of which none received Wagner’s guidance on interpretation. The composer was not in attendance when Das Rheingold premiered on September 22, 1869, nor was he at the repeat performances on the 24th and the 26th, though he later learned that the production had fallen well below his intentions. A year later, despite Wagner’s protestations, Die Walküre was also hastily prepared and mounted without his direct involvement. With the same conductor and production team, it debuted on June 26, 1870, with a second presentation three days later; in July, both Das Rheingold and Die Walküre were given in alternation at the king’s request. Wagner stayed away to distance himself from the production, and had also insisted that his friends boycott the performances. Some of them, however, attended anyway, including his future father-in-law, Franz Liszt.

Wagner’s efforts to dissociate himself from these initial stagings of the first two operas of the Ring ended up being a rather effective strategy in preserving the “extraordinariness” of the future premiere of the complete cycle, i.e. at the Bayreuth Festival in 1876. By limiting his—and others—support of the Munich productions (Wagner had insisted to Ludwig that they should only be given to a closed—that is, invited—audience, not a paying public), these performances became recognized as only provisional, and were therefore, not considered to be the true premieres of the operas.69 This may be a reason why very few foreign accounts reached Americans, who learned nothing of the behind-the-scenes tribulations, or how they affected the

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performances. Mostly, what readers gained from available reports was a very basic idea of the musical and visual aspects of the operas and something of the main critical reactions toward them. Concerning Das Rheingold, they only got an inkling of what the music may have sounded like though it was evident it had polarized critics. Among the opposition was Henry F. Chorley (1808–1872), the English critic of the London Athenaeum, whose unfavorable review appeared in Dwight’s Journal of Music and the American periodical, Every Saturday. He panned the music as consisting of “scanty, and spare, and stale melodic phrases…foisted on the public by feeble and inflated efforts at orchestral intricacy…[which] are complicated and worked to death…” Chorley also dismissed as “excuses” the view of Wagner’s supporters that the lack of rehearsals was to blame for the incomprehensibility of the music. He claimed that strategies aimed at improving the reception of Rheingold, as devised by the composer’s advocates, were pointless. In a letter to the Athenaeum (also reprinted in Dwight’s), English pianist and conductor Walter Bache suggested that audiences might better understand Wagner’s operas if they were more consistently exposed to them with the text and music together, if not through staged performances, then at least through entire scenes given with voice and pianoforte. In response, Chorley roundly dismissed Bache’s idea, stating that,

No reiteration of flat and pompous truisms, I am convinced, will give grace, variety, or originality to the inane and unmeaning phrases allotted to the singers in ‘Das Rheingold,’ – dramatic interest or poetry to its awkward and scarcely intelligible legend, told in flat or outrageous language, -- nor practicability to scenic combinations ridiculous because impossible.

A somewhat more comprehensive and balanced account of the premiere of Die Walküre was printed in Dwight’s, a personal letter from a friend of the editor who had witnessed the performance. It was the first article Americans read about this opera that conveyed a sense of

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70 The German press reception of the 1869 premiere of Das Rheingold is discussed extensively by Kolland, in Chapter 4 of Die kontroverse Rezeption, 97–134.


72 DJM 29, no. 17 (6 Nov 1869), 130–31. Bache’s letter was dated 15 Sep 1869; Chorley’s response on 23 Sep 1869. Bache (1842–1888) studied piano with Liszt, whose music (and Wagner’s) he vigorously promoted in England; see entry for “Bache, Walter” in Grove Music Online, by Nicholas Temperley.

how its plot, music, and visual aspects were integrated. Here, for example, is how the writer relayed the events of the first act:

[T]he curtain rises, showing a large, rudely built hall, with an oak tree in the centre, a large fireplace, an immense wooden door at the back and some primitive looking furniture. The first act is composed of uninterrupted solos. It is all in an andante recitative, becoming allegro in moments of passion and excitement. Once during the love-scene of the two who have most of the music of this act, a sudden blast is heard, the back door is blown open showing a beautiful landscape on the Rhine, and the moon throws down its soft light on the two lovers and renders the scene supremely picturesque. Here Wagner for a moment forgot himself, and the national drama, and introduced what might almost be called a melody. The accompaniment is soft and tremulous, a perfect musical representation of shimmering moonlight.

Comparable descriptions about the second and third acts followed. Concerning the opera’s music, however, the writer echoed the mixed opinions that were expressed by many European critics, as examined recently by Hubert Kolland. Most of them agreed that certain dramatic moments, such as Siegmund’s “Liebesgesang” near the end of the first act, as well as the “Ride of the Valkyries” and “Wotan’s Farewell” which frame the third act, were full of inspiration and originality. Other parts, such as the extended dialogues of the second act, were criticized for being monotonous to the extreme. Dwight’s correspondent found the dramatic pacing of these latter sections to be awkward (“badly arranged in reference to its climaxes”) and concurred with other reporters that they were all the more wearisome in their lack of discernible vocal melodies and the absence of vocal numbers à-là-Italian opera. (Wagner’s supporters though, placed the blame on the lackluster interpretations of the singers, as they had not been directly advised by the composer.) The orchestral music, on the other hand, captivated the writer, who described it as “graphic and impressive”, especially in its ability to express “almost every known human feeling.” Along with Wagner’s evocative orchestration, Dwight’s correspondent was also taken with the “elaborate mise-en-scène”, particularly the lighting and cloud effects used throughout. It was these elements, he noted, that helped to make Die Walküre a tolerable experience. Yet, the writer was skeptical that they alone could sustain

74 See Chapter 5 of Kolland’s Die kontroverse Rezeption, 135–78.
sufficient interest in the opera and doubted the work would ever make an impact beyond Munich. In due time, of course, he was proven wrong.

Given that most Americans had yet to hear music from the \textit{Ring} operas, interested readers of the above reviews could only have formulated an abstract idea of what the first two parts of the cycle might have looked and sounded like. Even so, these articles gave them a glimpse into the large scale of the stage production as well as an idea of the latest evolution in the Wagnerian integration of poetry and music. Reading about these stagings, which were performed with an orchestra of over eighty musicians (much larger than any theatre ensemble they would have known), and which also employed complex scenic effects to create a mythical world, would presumably have aroused their imaginations. They may have tried to fathom the experience of a “superb pantomime with a grand, effective, powerful, accompanying symphony”, as Dwight’s enthusiastic correspondent put it. Within the next few years, their conceptual knowledge about the \textit{Ring} became concrete, as they heard excerpts from its operas for the first time on U.S. soil.

\textbf{Part III: 1870–1876}

\textit{Shifts on the Horizon: New Performances and Responses to Wagner’s Music in the U.S.}

The American interest in Wagner that had been rising steadily during the 1850s and 60s reached a turning point in the first half of the 1870s, during which the pace of the performance and reception of Wagner’s music in the United States dramatically accelerated. Several factors contributed to this development: a notable increase in premieres and performances of Wagner’s music in the concert hall and on stage; the rise of a new group of American critics who embraced and advocated “the music of the future”; and a surge in available publications about the composer and his operas. This context eventually gave rise to the significant American involvement with the 1876 premiere of the complete \textit{Ring} cycle in Bayreuth.

At this time, Theodore Thomas was ascending to the peak of his conducting career, and
continued in his aggressive advocacy of Wagner’s music to the broad American public. Wagner excerpts were featured not only in the programs of his regular seasonal activities in New York, Boston, and Chicago, but also in the concerts of his extensive trans-American tours.\textsuperscript{75} The Thomas orchestra was single-handedly responsible as well for the majority of the national and local premieres of extracts from the composer’s latest works, including: the first Boston performance of the Overture to \textit{Die Meistersinger} (6 April 1870), the American premiere of the Prelude and Liebestod from \textit{Tristan und Isolde} (6 December 1871) in Boston, and later, its Chicago premiere (10 October 1872). Other selections from Wagner’s earlier works were also introduced, such as the Overture to \textit{Die fliegende Holländer} (14 October 1870 in Boston), as well as the Introduction and Bacchanale from \textit{Tannhäuser} in New York (25 April 1873; American premiere) and Boston (10 March 1875).\textsuperscript{76}

Increasingly positive public response to Wagner’s music in the concert hall encouraged impresarios to attempt several new stagings of Wagner’s operas in Boston, Chicago, and New York. On January 20, 1871, the Boston premiere of \textit{Tannhäuser} by the New German Opera Troupe\textsuperscript{”} was given at the Boston Theatre. Almost a month later, on February 17, the same opera was given its second—but its first uncut—presentation by Max Maretzek’s New German Combination Troupe at Crosby’s Opera House in Chicago. Not long afterward, \textit{Lohengrin} had its U.S. debut at New York’s Neues Stadttheater on April 3, by a German company conducted by Adolph Neuendorff. It was subsequently given thirteen more performances, the greatest number any Wagner opera had received to date. Several years later in March 1874, Maurice Strakosch’s company gave four presentations of an Italian-language version of \textit{Lohengrin} at the Academy of Music, starring Italo Campanini and Christine Nilsson in the title roles. Seeking as well to capitalize on the Academy’s audience, Neuendorff leased the venue in December 1875

\textsuperscript{75} On the Thomas orchestra’s touring “highways”, see Charles Edward Russell’s \textit{The American Orchestra and Theodore Thomas} (New York: Double, Page and Company, 1927), 318. Thomas also became an important figure in Cincinnati, where he founded a May Festival of choral and orchestral concerts.

\textsuperscript{76} See FP. The Chicago premiere of the \textit{Meistersinger} Overture was given by an unnamed orchestra, probably led by William Grosicurth on 5 January 1871.
for two German presentations of the opera, which featured German star singers Theodore Wachtel and Eugenie Pappenheim.

According to reviews, these performances were attended by American audiences which were variously described as “immense”, “earnest”, and “enthusiastic”. In New York, the Academy of Music was reported to be “densely crowded” for both Italian and German performances of Lohengrin, thus prompting enthusiastic claims from reviewers that the opera was “now the most popular in New York of any opera in existence.” In Boston and Chicago, where Americans had been more wary about Wagner’s music than New Yorkers, critics were surprised by the jam-packed auditoriums. The single performance of Tannhäuser at Crosby’s drew a full house of over 2,500, a response that belied an earlier circumstance when poor advanced ticket sales forced Crosby to cancel a staging of the opera in December 1865.

However, the quality of these productions did not exhibit much advancement since the first staged performances a decade earlier. Although German artists were hired (in most instances) and reportedly made sincere efforts in their various roles, musical resources were otherwise limited; Maretzek’s orchestra, for example, only had twenty-five musicians, and had difficulties being heard in the large auditorium at Crosby’s. Scenic materials were also inadequate to convey the grand visual effect that Wagner intended for the operas, and did not translate on vast stages such as that the Academy of Music. The works themselves were substantially abridged. Yet, such shortcomings in the productions did not seem to bother the critics of this period, who were focused on discussing the musical content of the operas. Their responses to the composer’s music at this time are historically noteworthy, for together, they represent a major turning point for Wagner criticism in the American context.

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77 For example, see reviews in the New York Tribune, 30 Mar 1874, 7; and 16 Dec 1875, 4.
The change in the tenor and critical approach to Wagner’s music in the U.S. was expedited by a new guard of pro-Wagnerian critics who had recently replaced their more skeptical predecessors at newspapers of high circulation. The most prominent included John Rose Green Hassard who had, since 1866, assumed the position at the New York Tribune, and John P. Jackson of the New York Herald. To cultivate American audiences for Wagner, they believed that listeners required initiation into the operas in order that they be appreciated properly. Taking their cue from the advocates of a Germanic canon of symphonic music, these critics counseled in their columns that repeated exposure to Wagner’s music (as through concert excerpts) would help mitigate the complexities of his operas. Their reviews of performances became an influential platform for educating readers, thereby establishing the worth of Wagner’s music. This is a situation in which critics stood to shape taste and the notion of a musical “canon”; as Karen Ahlquist has observed:

The German canon brought new tasks for music critics. Because musical complexity was not readily understood, it depended on explanation. Hard music needed proselytizing on behalf of music, its composers, and critical authority. In order to bother with a difficult repertoire, the public would need to accept its inherent superiority. In order to know which works to value most highly and why, it would also have to accept the idea of critical expertise.\(^79\)

This new sensibility in American Wagner criticism is evident, for example, in the Daily Advertiser’s review of the 1871 staging of Tannhäuser in Boston. In his commentary, the critic suggests a strategy that could improve Americans’ appreciation of the opera, that is, “In the midst of recitative of the dullest order of vocal composition, one can almost always turn to the orchestra and become thoroughly interested, if he not be absolutely pleased.”\(^80\) As he explains, the orchestral score is worthy of attention because Wagner shows “astonishing capacity and ingenuity in elaborating his ideas through the medium of the orchestra and in his most inspired moments, he attains a subtle expressiveness in this kind to which no operatic composer has ever reached.” Thus, on these merits, the critic implies that the orchestral part should be the

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\(^79\) Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 192.

\(^80\) Boston Daily Advertiser, 21 Jan 1871, col. H.
listener’s main guide through the drama. In doing so, one could overcome the more challenging aspects of the Wagnerian aesthetic, such as the “endless melody” of the vocal parts.

The notion of understanding opera through its music over the text as the chief bearer of emotional and dramatic meaning was not entirely novel to Americans. This orientation helped them adapt to Italian-language opera in previous decades, as Ahlquist has argued convincingly in her study, Democracy at the Opera. However, its specific application to cultivating American tastes for Wagner opera was fresh at this time. There was one chief difference: appreciation of Italian opera music tended to center on the vocal melody, whereas for Wagner’s works, the main guide to comprehending the drama was the orchestral score. Wagner, in fact, had long been aware of how this principle would be vital in winning over an international audience for his Ring cycle, not just Germans. While in negotiations with B. Schott and Sons in December 1859, he had then sought to convince them to publish his Ring scores by emphasizing that the music of the cycle would be the source of its appeal in non-German countries such as France and England. Writing in a letter,

As a matter of fact…I consider that The Rhinegold and the whole of my Nibelung cycle is as sure to appeal to the German spirit for all time as any other national work of the past, and it is my expectation of this exceptional popularity which encourages me to believe in a strong reaction upon France and England, to whom the door to this particular type of German poetry can only be opened by music.81

The American journalists’ swift recognition of Wagner’s principle that the orchestral score was the key to comprehending his operas was due partly to their being better musically educated (or having “closer ties to the music profession”, as Jessica Gienow-Hecht put it) than reporters past.82 They were able to provide relatively sophisticated analyses of the composer’s works for their readers and thereby, through their articles, hoped to encourage Americans’ proper listening and comprehension of them. This objective is evident in some of the reviews of the 1871 performances. Going beyond simply pointing to the various orchestral “effects”, some

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81 LRW, 89.
82 See Gienow-Hecht, Sound Diplomacy, especially 122–28.
critics described how certain motives recurred and evolved throughout the opera. For example, in his commentary on Lohengrin, the New York Times's critic highlighted a motive first heard when Elsa sings about her vision of a knight in Act I (Einsam in trueben Tagen), and explained how it subsequently reappears and evolves:

The melody on which her words are threaded is sweet, but vague, and it would be of slight impressiveness were it not for the accompaniment, of a most delicate order, and embodying the motive which courses, in an infinite variety of forms, through the whole opera. [...] The same phrase is again recited by the quartet when Elsa chooses for a champion the unknown Knight, and again and again it is repeated—now in its completeness, now divided, and always in a fashion denoting the power of a master hand.83

This type of analysis (i.e. tracing the evolution of motives) was soon adopted as a fundamental part of American critics’ discourse on Wagner’s music. The approach ultimately paved the way for the future acceptance of the “leitmotivic” method of comprehension, which became a particularly potent strategy to help prepare audiences for the complexities of the Ring cycle.

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Accompanying these new developments in the performance and critical reception of Wagnerian opera in the U.S. was a rise in the number of essays, books, and other published literature on the composer. This surge was largely driven by certain editors and writers, particularly of American literary journals, who had rapidly determined Wagner to be an important cultural figure now meriting substantial coverage. The Atlantic Monthly, for instance, had not published anything on Wagner, his theories, or his operas since its founding in 1857, until William F. Apthorp (1848–1913) became its chief music writer in 1872. Newer magazines founded during the 1870s, like the Century Illustrated Monthly, also took advantage of the blossoming fascination with Wagner.84 In existing music periodicals like Dwight’s Journal of Music, the number of Wagner-related articles per issue in escalated between 1870 and 1876.85

83 New York Times, 8 Apr 1871, 2.
85 See especially DJM 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, and 35.
There must also have been increased attention paid to Wagner in German-language American periodicals as well, although this is a topic that still awaits research.

Fresh attention was given particularly to Wagner’s theories, which had recently become accessible to the public through a variety of printed editions. Wagner himself at this time had his theoretical writings republished as a multi-volume collected work.\(^{86}\) For the benefit of English-speaking Americans, several essays from this collection were translated and compiled into a volume entitled *Art, Life and Theories of Richard Wagner*, by Edward L. Burlingame, the Bostonian editor of *Scribner’s Magazine*.\(^{87}\) They also had access to an English translation of *The Music of the Future*, by German-born English writer Edward Dannreuther.\(^{88}\) Among the most popular publications, however, was the composer’s famous essay on Beethoven translated into English by Albert R. Parsons in 1872, with the “author’s permission and approbation.” It did so well that a second edition was released in 1874; as Cosima had recorded in her diary on January 23, “it is described there as one of the most significant books of our time—a very remarkable sign!”\(^{89}\)

Similarly, Wagner’s life and accomplishments to date were examined with renewed intensity. Dannreuther completed a full-length biography of the composer in English, entitled *Richard Wagner*, which was published in 1873.\(^{90}\) In journals and newspapers, there was some considerable effort to forge an image of Wagner as the “revolutionary artistic genius”, away from the “mad-man” caricatures created by some earlier writers. This revisionist attitude is apparent, for example, in the following statement by George B. Miles for an article in *Appletons’ Journal*:

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\(^{86}\) Readers of *Dwight’s Journal of Music* were made aware of this release by an article reprinted from the London *Observer* by E.W. Fritzsch of Leipzig; see “Richard Wagner’s Collected Writings,” in DJM 31, no. 22 (27 Jan 1872): 172–73.

\(^{87}\) Published by Henry Holt and Co. of New York in 1875. It was subsequently reviewed by Apthorp for the *Atlantic Monthly* 36 (Aug 1875): 253–56.


\(^{89}\) *Beethoven* (Indianapolis: Benham Brothers, 1872). A review of this translation was printed in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 July 1872. 4. Cosima’s comment can be found in CWD 1, 726.

\(^{90}\) Dannreuther’s biography of Wagner was published in London by Augener and Co., 1873. A contemporaneous review of this book and *The Music of the Future* (see note 84) by “J.C.” for the *London Musical Standard* was reprinted in DJM 33, no. 25 (21 Mar 1874): 194–95.
Wagner is a composer of undoubted talent, whose ideas, although sometimes carried to extremes, will eventually have a beneficial effect on music, from their very boldness and vigor, if from nothing else. Again, he is a poet of great dramatic power, and a writer possessing literary abilities of no common order.\(^9_1\)

Not insignificantly, the recasting of Wagner’s persona coincided with the news that the composer had resumed work on the \textit{Ring} project and was intending to fulfill his plans to stage it at a festival in Bayreuth, Germany. In anticipation of the event, critics began to praise Wagner and his endeavor openly, often in lofty terms. In one instance, responding to the news of the laying of the \textit{Festspielhaus}'s foundation stone in May 1872, a journalist for the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} characterized Wagner as a “daring genius” who “has had to contend [with] all of Europe” as he labored on the \textit{Ring} “with undaunting courage” over the last twenty years. Even before Wagner had completed the composition of the cycle’s final opera, \textit{Götterdämmerung}, the critic already assured his American readers the composer will succeed:

> The future of Richard Wagner is at hand, and the Nibelungen Trilogy,--in which he has combined all the arts,--painting, poetry, song, and the drama, in which he has realized to their full completion the great reforms which Beethoven, and Handel, and Gluck commenced,--we make no doubt, will crown him with the wreaths of victory for which he has struggled all his life.\(^9_2\)

\textbf{Transatlantic Connections: Americans and the Development of the Ring Project}

It bears mentioning that the new wave of American interest in Wagner and his music during the early 1870s was aided, in part, by a significant rise in transatlantic travel and exchange between the United States and Europe.\(^9_3\) As steamship travel became more efficient and less costly for the average citizen, larger numbers of Americans ventured to the Old World and Europeans to the New. Following unification in 1871, Germany in particular became a major destination for Americans. Many musicians, composers, and students of various subjects ventured to cities there, seeking inspiration as well as “foreign experience”, and to take

\(^{9_1}\) Appletons’ \textit{Journal of Literature, Science and Art} 7, no. 168 (15 June 1872): 661.
\(^{9_2}\) \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 9 June 1872, 4.
advantage of the nation's many excellent educational institutions.\textsuperscript{94} American music critics too began to make the transatlantic journey more frequently to attend European performances and give accounts of them for their readers back home. In the opposite direction, Germans flowed into the U.S. to pursue lucrative opportunities, temporary and permanent. Virtuosi, such as the pianist Hans von Bülow, crossed over to give extensive concert tours of cities and towns throughout the country. Numerous others saw their lives and careers as being too restricted in parts of newly-unified Germany, and left permanently for the United States, thus contributing to a second great influx of immigration.\textsuperscript{95} Among those seeking better prospects was the conductor Leopold Damrosch, a friend and advocate of Wagner’s, who took advantage of an invitation from New York’s Arion Society Chorus to leave his post in Breslau and immigrate to the U.S. with his family in 1871. With many of their friends and artistic acquaintances leaving for America, along with the increased number of American visitors to Germany, the Wagners must have been well aware of this heightened cultural exchange.

In 1869, several American periodicals picked up the thread of Wagner’s resumed work on the orchestral score of \textit{Siegfried} after a twelve-year hiatus. By the end of the year, he had made headway on \textit{Götterdämmerung}, completing a composition sketch for the Prelude and “Siegfried’s Journey to the Rhine”. As he continued to work on the orchestral sketch in early 1870, Wagner searched for a suitable theatre for the future presentation of his \textit{Ring}. His original consideration was the Baroque-period Margravial Opera House (\textit{Markgräfliches Opernhaus}) in the Franconian city of Bayreuth. Although it had a large stage and exceptional acoustics, it was soon found to be unsuitable for the complex scenic designs and stage technology necessary for


\textsuperscript{95} Over one million Germans emigrated to the United States between 1865 and 1879, with two thirds coming from north and east Germany, including Prussia; see Chapter 1 of Stanley Nadel’s study, “Kleindeutschland: New York City’s Germans, 1848–1880” (PhD diss. Columbia University, 1981).
Bayreuth’s central position though, in the mid-east region of Germany in northern Bavaria, as well as the city’s lack of significant competing attractions, made it an attractive location for his festival. On May 12, 1871, Wagner circulated a letter announcing his intentions to have the entire cycle performed there in a special theatre of his own design, during the summer of 1873 (a deadline soon to be moved to a later date). An English translation of the entire transcript was made available in America several months later in *Dwight’s Journal of Music.* As the article outlined, the *Ring* operas would be given over four evenings in succession, for a total of three complete cycles, and all aspects of their production placed entirely under Wagner’s direction.

Americans also learned of the composer’s plans to fund the performances through the purchase of “patron certificates” (*Patronatschein*) by public devotees of his art (“an association of friends”). At the cost of 300 German thalers, one certificate entitled the patron a seat to all three cycles (or twelve performances). To facilitate the scheme, the music dealer Emil Heckel devised the idea to form “societies” to help raise the funds. Taking the initiative, he founded the first Wagner Society in Mannheim. However, preliminary fundraising efforts in the fall of 1871 were not as successful as desired, so Heckel devised another plan that allowed each society to buy certificates on behalf of their members, who in turn, would draw lots for seats. In the U.S., the details of this latter arrangement first appeared in the October 1871 issue of *Scribner’s Monthly* and again, two months later in the *New York Times.* While the writer in *Scribner’s* was less optimistic that Wagner would receive support from outside Bavaria, the *Times’s* correspondent tried to encourage interest by claiming that many tickets were already purchased for what promised to be a “star-studded” event. As he surmised, “The list of those who have

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96 The idea of this theatre as a possible venue came to Wagner when he saw it featured in an encyclopedia article. It was built in 1747 for the Margrave Frederick (1735–1763) and his wife, Friederike Wilhelmine Sophie. On the theatre’s history and design, see Luisa Hager and Lorenz Seelig’s *Markgräfliches Opernhaus Bayreuth: Amtlicher Führer* (Munich: Bayerische Verwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, 1996.)

97 DJM 31, no. 11 (26 Aug 1871): 88. A brief summary of the contents of this announcement was also printed in *The Independent,* 20 July 1871, 23.
taken tickets is already considerable, and among the names there are some very well known.”

Heckel’s new scheme was initially effective. Within the year, the first Wagner societies were formed in Berlin, Leipzig, and other German cities, as well as Vienna and London. Together, they raised 100,000 thalers, which helped enable the laying of the foundation stone for the Festspielhaus on May 22, 1872. A complete translation of Wagner’s address on this occasion was printed a month later in the New York Times and Dwight’s Journal of Music. From the first half of his speech, Americans learned about the unique design of the building. It would be a temporary structure, Wagner described, consisting of “merely an external shell, built with the most scanty material.” Inside, there would be “an almost perfect lack of decoration”, with a novel arrangement of the stage and auditorium which, he informed, would place one “in a relation to the expected festal play”, so that “the mysterious sound of the music will prepare you for the revelation of scenic pictures.” These scenes, he envisioned, “will appear to you as from an ideal dream world and announce to you the whole reality of the most entrancing illusion that art is capable of.” In the second part of his address, Wagner expounded on his hope that the Festspielhaus would be the site for a national and spiritual rebirth, and come to embody the German spirit. While this pro-German assertion might have been problematic elsewhere in Europe, it did not appear to trouble American critics, who responded in the papers to Wagner’s speech with much enthusiasm. Some already described the yet-unbuilt theatre in quasi-religious terms, like one reporter for the Chicago Daily Tribune, who wrote (italics mine):

Through the munificence of Louis, King of Bavaria, in a spot forever consecrated by the genius of Jean Paul, will arise the fair proportions of this great temple of art, in which, next year, Richard Wagner will produce his gigantic work, the “Nibelungen Trilogy,” lasting three days in its performance and exhausting all the resources of modern scenic and dramatic skill.

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100 Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 June 1872, 4. The critic has erroneously suggested here that Ludwig gave monetary support for the construction of the Festspielhaus at this early stage but in fact, the king did not step in with his sizable contribution until 1874.
All these news reports on the gathering momentum towards the Ring project’s fulfillment aroused Americans’ interest in the cycle’s music. Although extracts from the first three operas had already been performed in various European cities, they were yet to be given in the U.S. One reason for the delay was that the music was difficult to obtain. In 1871, Theodore Thomas wrote directly to Wagner requesting his permission to perform excerpts from the Ring in the United States. Wagner refused, however, on the grounds that the American copyright laws were not yet in place to protect foreign composers. Finding this response to be unsatisfactory, Thomas continued to pursue the composer for his consent, but after several more unfruitful attempts, he contacted Hans von Bülow instead to see if he might lend him the scores. Von Bülow diplomatically responded in the negative, stating he did not actually own any copies of the excerpts, and informed Thomas that Wagner was, in fact, denying all requests for them, even from German conductors, for artistic reasons. Thomas’s best hope, he counseled, might be to make his case to the composer in person.

In the end, Thomas managed to avoid a transatlantic journey to see Wagner as he was eventually able to procure a manuscript of “The Ride of the Valkyries”. He was not forthcoming in his autobiography about how exactly he acquired the music, except that “[t]he score and parts arrived one morning during a rehearsal. The package was brought to me, and I explained to the orchestra what was contained. We were all eager to try it.” On September 17, 1872, Thomas

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101 According to the American critic W.S.B. Mathews: “[i]t was well known that Wagner, with the utmost care, guarded his compositions, refusing to allow any of them to go to America under the belief that America would lose for him his European copyright.” See Russell, The American Orchestra and Theodore Thomas, 84.

102 As von Bülow wrote to Thomas: “[Wagner] absolutely refuses to all German conductors the permission to perform portions of his later works… and in this he is right, for what is written for the stage, and in Germany is performed there, the composer does not wish to have find its way into the concert hall.” In MTT, 78–79. That Wagner was turning away requests from German conductors for selections from Die Walküre is confirmed in several diary entries by Cosima Wagner between 1871 and 1872: see 25 Jan 1871, 327; 28 Mar 1871, 352; and 17 Apr 1872, 477 in CWD 1. It is also worth noting that other conductors in the U.S. besides Thomas made requests to Wagner for excerpts from the Ring. According to Cosima’s diary entry on 9 July 1872, Wagner had received a letter from Carl Bergmann asking for “the Magic Fire Music” (CWD 1, 509). Bergmann’s request was not granted since the American premiere of that excerpt did not occur until 1875, and was performed by Theodore Thomas and his orchestra.

103 TMA 2, 27. Rose Fay Thomas also did not know how her husband obtained this score; in her Memoirs, she
and his orchestra gave “The Ride” its American premiere at an “all-Wagner” concert for New York’s Central Park Garden series. According to newspaper reports, it was received with astounding enthusiasm by the public. Thomas observed that “people jumped on the chairs and shouted”; his wife, Rose, added that many were also “waving hats and handkerchiefs until [Thomas] obliged to give it a second time.”

Aside from introducing the first musical excerpt from the Ring to Americans, the September 17th concert was pivotal in another respect: a dinner followed, at which a number of prominent New York citizens proposed that a Wagner Verein (or “union”) be formally organized with Thomas as its president. Like Wagner societies in Europe, it would “aid in furthering the purpose of Wagner in giving his first grand musico-dramatic festival at Baireuth.” More specifically, the Verein would raise funds for the purchase of tickets to the Festival and to defray traveling expenses of Americans to and from Bayreuth. The Wagners soon learned about its formation, about which Wagner sent Thomas a cloying letter expressing his gratitude.

During the following months, the New York Wagner Union organized two benefit concerts for the cause. According to The Independent on October 24, 1872, the membership fee to join the Verein was $25, which covered admission to both concerts and the chance of drawing a “patron certificate” to the Festival, “entitling the holder to admission to all the performances for one week, and with it a passage ticket for the ocean trip outward and home again.” The concerts, which took place in November 1872 and March 1873, drew in four hundred members, raising $10,000 in total.

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reasoned that he received the music because of his close relationships with various composers, musicians and publishers; see MTT, 80. The critic W.S.B. Mathews believed that Thomas may have received copies of the manuscript from von Bülow in the end (despite what he said in his letter to Thomas) or from Liszt, who may have had them replicated without Wagner’s knowledge; see W.S.B. Mathews, ed., A Hundred Years of Music in America: An Account of Musical Effort in America (Chicago, G.L. Howe, 1889), 421–22.

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104 TMA 1, 26–27; MTT, 77.
105 MTT, 80.
106 Wagner’s letter, dated 15 October 1872, is translated and printed in MTT, 81–82. Cosima’s diary entry for that date corroborates the existence of the union: “the people in New York send us the statutes of their Society, which has now been formed”; see CWD 1, 542.
107 As Cosima Wagner recorded in her diary on 30 November 1872, “from New York the news [is] that they have already collected 5,000 dollars.” Several months later, on April 5, 1873, she mentioned that “the Wagner Society [of New York] is giving a concert for Bayreuth.” See CWD 1, 563 and 574. The April entry likely refers to a concert that occurred on March 28, 1873; see the New York Times review on 29 Mar 1873, 7.
Unfortunately, little information survives about the early American Wagner societies, the number of members they had, their activities, and for how long they existed, but one newspaper article from the period offers some insight. According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on October 29, 1872, the governing committee of the New York Verein was comprised of some of the city’s prominent citizens, including: Dr. Ernst Krakowizer (First Vice President), an Austrian émigré who was an eminent physician of Brooklyn and New York; Julius Hallgarten (Treasurer), the son of a major New York banker; and Udo Brachvogel (Deputy Secretary), a writer and a significant figure in the German-American publishing world, with close ties to the city’s operatic scene. The remaining officers were Dr. Fr. Zinsser (Second Vice President), J. Otto Toussaint (Deputy Treasurer), and Otto Witte (Secretary). Outside of New York, an equivalent organization was established in Boston, with well-known organist Benjamin J. Lang at its head. Lang himself likely spearheaded the founding of the Boston society; he and his wife had visited the Wagners in Bayreuth in July 1871, and had pledged to offer their assistance to publicize the Festival to Americans. In Chicago, several notable civilians “under the auspices of Mr. Florenz Ziegfeld” were reportedly taking steps to establish their own local Wagner society. In the view of the *Daily Tribune*’s writer, the formation of these Verein in response to the composer’s call for support demonstrated Americans’ cultural progressivism, relative to the rest of the world:

> The fact of the organization of this [New York] Verein speaks well for American musicians...It shows...that Wagner has exerted such an influence upon the music of the world that although the Festival will be purely German and entirely inspired by Wagner, yet it is regarded as an international occurrence in the world of art, in which America intends to be represented.

Thomas too, was sure that Americans’ contribution to the Bayreuth cause would “bring the musical world of America into direct association with that of Europe, on an equal footing.”

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108 Lang came to know Wagner through Liszt, who was his piano teacher in the late 1850s. Cosima’s diary entries from July 21 to 24 document the Langs’ visit, which was well-received by her and Wagner. On 12 February 1872, Cosima received a signed certificate of patronage from “Mrs. Lang in Massachusetts.”


110 MTT, 81.
To stimulate and sustain American interest in the *Ring* project, Thomas and his orchestra continued to introduce and energetically promote a limited number of selections from the cycle in the years leading up to the Festival. “The Ride of the Valkyries” was performed repeatedly at the Central Park Garden concerts, and Thomas also led the local premieres of the excerpt in St. Louis (14 October 1872), Philadelphia (23 November 1872), Boston (6 December 1872), Washington (22 January 1873), Cleveland (8 November 1873), and Brooklyn (7 February 1874).\(^\text{111}\) A dubious version of “Wotan’s Farewell” (without a soloist) was presented for the first time at New York’s Steinway Hall on November 9, 1872 whereas the more authoritative, standard adaptation, which combined the “Farewell” and the “Magic Fire Music”, was not acquired by Thomas until late 1874. This latter edition debuted at Philadelphia’s Academy of Music on January 6, 1875, with German baritone Franz Remmertz as soloist, and was given three days later in New York, and in Boston on January 20.\(^\text{112}\) In April, the Thomas Orchestra with tenor H.A. Bischoff gave the American premiere of “Sieg mund’s Love Song” at a Steinway Hall concert; a repeat performance occurred in September at Central Park Garden in a “New German School” program featuring works by Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner. By the time of the 1876 Bayreuth Festival, Americans had heard at last the same selections that Wagner had first previewed in his 1862–1863 Vienna concerts.

Critics and audiences responded warmly to the newest selections from *Die Walküre*. The journalist for the *New York Tribune* had unequivocal praise for “Wotan’s Farewell and Magic Fire Music”, writing that “the majestic soliloquy of Wotan is the finest of all the extracts from Wagner’s works which Theodore Thomas has set before us.” The “fire music”, he continued, is “not only beautiful in itself, but it throws out the preceding number in bold relief, and makes an

\(^{111}\) FP, 382.  
\(^{112}\) The concert featuring the premiere of “Wotan’s Farewell” (not mentioned previously in other sources) was reported in the *New York Times*, 10 Nov 1872, 4, and the *New York Tribune*, 14 Nov 1872, 2. How Thomas exactly obtained the score to “Wotan’s Farewell and Fire Music” is not known though he stated the manuscript surreptitiously arrived one day from Europe while he and his orchestra were on one of its trans-American tours; TMA 2, 26–27.
impressive termination to the extract.” He was also impressed with how the orchestral part effectively underscored the emotionally climatic moment of the “Farewell”. As he extolled:

Wotan bids farewell to the prostrated Brünnhilde in strains of the most exquisite pathos, equaling in tenderness the famous closing scene of “Lohengrin”, but far surpassing that beautiful creation in the grandeur and eloquence of the orchestral portion, which throughout is not an accompaniment but an integral part of the musical phrase.

The Tribune critic was equally effusive about “Siegmund’s Love Song”, which he described as “a gem of sustained melody and pure feeling to which we find no parallel in any of the earlier writers of the modern school” (he was referring here to Berlioz and Liszt whose music filled the first half of the concert.)

Reports on both excerpts in the New York Times were similarly favorable. The audiences present also responded to them heartily, repeatedly requesting for encores. This is quite noteworthy since Wagner programs given elsewhere were not always successful; for instance, an 1875 concert of excerpts from the Ring in Budapest, organized by Hans Richter in support of the Bayreuth Festival, did not sell enough tickets until Liszt stepped in to perform Beethoven’s Fifth Piano Concerto. Therefore, although Americans had heard only three excerpts from just one of the Ring cycle’s operas to date, their positive reactions to them seemed to indicate a remarkably receptive attitude towards Wagner’s magnum opus in the years before its premiere.

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Meanwhile, in Bayreuth, progress on the entire Ring project was steady but slow during the remainder of 1872. It soon became clear, however, that the initially proposed summer of 1873 was an overly ambitious deadline for the festival: Wagner had not yet finished the orchestration of Götterdämmerung, nor was his theatre ready. Rumors were already circulating in American papers that should the enterprise fail to come to fruition in Germany, the composer

114 New York Tribune, 10 Sep 1875, 4.
115 New York Times, 10 Jan 1875, 7; 11 Sep 1875, 4.
would bring the Ring across the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{117} Although these were merely speculations, Wagner struggled in 1873 to raise the necessary funds quickly enough to advance the completion of his endeavor. Especially disheartening was that only one-third of the available patron certificates had been purchased by August. The composer’s patriotic appeal for financial support from his countrymen and women was evidently met with much less fervor than expected, although this was more likely due to the severe financial crisis that affected many Germans (and Americans) that year rather than indifference to Wagner’s cause. Germany’s new chancellor Otto von Bismarck was also unmoved by the composer’s plea for government sponsorship in aid of a national art (not surprising, perhaps, as it was his decision to cease minting German currency in silver that triggered the economic “Panic of 1873”). Delays ensued in the construction of the Festspielhaus, and out of necessity, Wagner resumed conducting concerts and touring to raise money, leaving him scant time to work on his score. Somehow, a few enterprising Americans in Chicago got wind of Wagner’s financial woes and tried to woo him to relocate his festival to the Midwest.\textsuperscript{118} Although Wagner did not accept, the offer must have been tempting, considering his challenging circumstances.

In late autumn of 1873, sensing his enterprise was in danger of going bust, Wagner made a desperate request for assistance from his former patron, Ludwig II. The king refused at first, but later relented in January 1874, offering the composer a significant advance of 100,000 thalers. The loan helped renew the composer’s confidence and resolve to push on, but realistically, it was insufficient to see the entire project to the end. The Festival was postponed again, until 1876. Frustrated too with the apathy (whether actual or perceived) of his German compatriots, Wagner began to look outside his nation’s borders for more amenable sources of funding, especially westward to America. Around the same time as his receipt of Ludwig’s

\textsuperscript{117} See for example, Appletons’ Journal of Literature, Science and Art 7, no. 150 (10 Feb 1872): 166, in which it was already speculated a few months before the laying of the Festspielhaus’s foundation stone, that “in case Richard Wagner’s singular operatic enterprise at Bayreuth should fail, he intends to visit the United States.”

\textsuperscript{118} See WW, 506.
contribution, a relatively substantial donation also arrived from New York, which seemed to encourage him to make a greater effort to court Americans, especially German-Americans.\textsuperscript{119}

That summer, he penned a letter to Dexter Smith of the \textit{New Yorker StaatsZeitung}, requesting the editor’s help in soliciting their support. As he wrote,

\begin{quote}
I am obliged to you for the interest which, as I learn from your newspaper, you accord my works, and I am glad to explain my ideas to you. […] I do not think that Germany can take particular pride in the fact that America has to support me. […] But I would be most obliged to you and the American public, if your widely read newspaper succeeded in establishing an American fund for supporting my undertaking.\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

Wagner also made himself more readily available to the growing number of American journalists who sought him out at his villa, \textit{Wahnfried}, in Bayreuth to discuss the Festival. One of them was a French correspondent to the \textit{Philadelphia Press}, who revealed that the composer had insisted on finding out from him the state of Americans’ performance and reception of his music, in order to gauge the degree of their interest. According to the journalist, the American friend who accompanied him had

\begin{quote}
[… dilated to Wagner] on the growing appreciation of the music of the future in America, and of the admirable way in which “Lohengrin” had been presented there. Wagner was much interested, and asked him many questions, being [e]specially anxious to know if the people at large took any interest in his music, apart from the connoisseurs and the trained musicians.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

Yet, even while seeking to promote his cause to Americans, Wagner nevertheless remained ambivalent about them as a suitable audience for his art. He was uncertain they might not, after all, be any different from European audiences for opera (at least from his experience), though he sensed that since Americans lacked a strong national musical tradition or culture, they might be more amenable to his music. Speaking to Cosima in June 1874, he contemplated that

\begin{quote}
One might feel inclined to expect a lot from this quarter if experience did not show that every culture is bound up with the narrowest national feeling. But perhaps America doesn’t feel the need for so-called culture, in which case the humanity of these democratic gentlemen might emerge.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{119} On 23 January 1874, Cosima recorded in her diary that she received a 2,000-thaler donation from the New York Wagner Society; CWD 1, 726.
\textsuperscript{120} From the \textit{Bayreuther Festspielführer} 1924, 222–23; reprinted in Sabor, \textit{The Real Wagner}, 234.
\textsuperscript{121} “Wagner, the Composer,” DJM 34, no. 18 (12 Dec 1874): 348.
\textsuperscript{122} See entry from 11 June 1874 in CWD 1, 765. Wagner’s comment was in reaction to a “very correct” article about
While Wagner deliberated on whether to make the effort to solicit further American support for his Festival, preparations for the cycle’s impending premiere continued. During the summer of 1874, many journalists travelled to Bayreuth to report on the town and the completed Festspielhaus; among the American correspondents who made the journey was John P. Jackson of the New York Herald. For the first time, they had access to the interior of the theatre, and they enthusiastically described to their readers the unique construction of the auditorium. They conveyed as well some of the particulars concerning the Ring’s scenic and musical arrangements. Americans learned that Wagner had enlisted the talents of the brothers Gotthold (1844–1892) and Max Brückner (1836–1919), Carl Brandt (1828–1888), and Carl Emil Doepler (1824–1905), to whom he entrusted the scenic design, stage technology, and the costumes, respectively. They were also informed that the composer was in the process of selecting singers for the operas’ various roles, and was already coaching some of them at Wahnfried.

The following summer, Wagner summoned to Bayreuth the entire cast of singers and all 114 orchestral musicians for the first rehearsals at the Festspielhaus. Several accounts from eye-witnesses able to sneak a peek at the proceedings were made available to Americans. Two particularly informative previews from the London Musical World and the L’Indépendence Belge appeared in Dwight’s Journal of Music. Both testimonies were encouraging. The reporter for the Musical World marveled at Doepler’s costumes for the characters of the Ring, even though the composer did not like his designer’s overly historicized conception. The Belge’s correspondent was especially enthusiastic about the singers Wagner had selected for the various parts. He deemed nearly all of them “perfect” for their roles, as well as possessing

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123 The Festspielhaus published a month earlier that he had received from the New York Herald; see note 115. Cosima recorded in her diary his visit to “write reports on the theatre” on 13 and 18 May 1874; see CWD 1, 717 and 759.
124 For example, see “The Wagner Theatre at Bayreuth,” in DJM 34, no. 7 (11 July 1874): 257–58. This article was reprinted from the London News.
excellent declamation and beautiful voices. The journalist was also captivated by the trial operation of the lighting, and considered the various stage effects to be “very ingenious”, such as the steam infused with colored light to “imitate mists, clouds, rainbows, etc.” After the final rehearsal, he noted that the reception was warmly appreciative, with “stamping and cheers for Wagner”, and concluded eagerly, that “success next year [in 1876] appears henceforth certain.”

The promising news about the Ring’s forthcoming premiere seemed to encourage many more Americans to consider making the journey to Bayreuth. According to entries in Cosima’s diary from that summer, her husband received a large number of petitions from the United States for patronage certificates. Wagner had initially held back some of these tickets for the “Reich authorities”, in the hope that they would offer their financial backing after all. However, he decided that if further negotiations with them came to naught, he reckoned Americans would “fill his hall in the end”, though it was “nothing for the Germans to be proud of”. Support from across the Atlantic seemed all the more important now, since Bismarck’s assistance never came through.

As mounting financial concerns loomed once again in late-autumn 1875, Wagner decided to accept an invitation for a commission from across the Atlantic. In Philadelphia, preparations were being made for the centennial celebration of the country’s founding. Among the events planned was a six-month-long, grand international exhibition to take place during the summer of 1876. To coordinate the musical component of the festivities, including the opening and closing ceremonies, the Women’s Centennial Executive Committee selected Theodore Thomas, the most renowned American conductor of the day. Determined to exhibit the best of American music for the inaugural concert, Thomas commissioned works by American-born composers John Knowles Paine and Dudley Buck, as well as one by Wagner. Although the latter might be regarded as an unusual choice, Thomas was certain that the inclusion of a specially created work by the composer of the “music of the future” would bring the event to

126 See Cosima’s diary entries from 20 and 21 June 1875; CWD 1, 853.
international attention (especially as it would occur shortly before the Bayreuth Festival), as well as demonstrate American cultural progress. For Wagner, Thomas’s commission came at a most opportune moment. Having limited time and dwindling financial resources, it offered him a chance to finally cash in on Americans’ interest in his music, and thus secure some of the funds he needed to help see his Bayreuth project through to completion.

The 1876 Centennial March: A Reappraisal

Since the American Centennial March (or Großer Festmarsch) played a key part in cementing the association between Wagner and the United States, the context of its commission and the piece itself warrant a detailed examination here. In fact, this will be a necessary re-examination, as previous scholarship on the march has raised questions about Wagner’s attitude toward America, issues connected to reservations about the work’s aesthetic value. The basic circumstances of its commission are now quite well known, especially the awkward situation that arose from Wagner and Thomas’s disagreement concerning the rights to ownership and distribution of the March’s score. Thomas, then the composer’s most significant American advocate, believed Wagner had violated their contract, and subsequently felt wounded by the outcome (this is perhaps a—if not, the—reason Thomas never went to Bayreuth). Scholars of Thomas’s life and career have mostly thought the conductor a victim of Wagner’s ruthless determination to profit financially as much as possible from the publication of his march. The extent that this was true, however, is somewhat exaggerated. More likely, the misunderstanding resulted, in part, due to the limitations of transatlantic communication, as well as complications arising from the ambiguities of international copyright laws at the time. Although much of the correspondence between Wagner and Thomas is no longer extant, what materials remain available deserve fresh consideration. Based on the existing evidence, it is

more likely that both parties were motivated by financial and personal concerns to make the most of their collaboration. In particular, Wagner’s actions show the extent to which he sought to draw on the American connection to support his Bayreuth project.

In addition to the thorny situation surrounding the Centennial March’s commission, the work itself has generally been perceived as lacking in artistic merit, and not worth the large $5,000 fee Wagner had demanded—and received—for it. According to Thomas’s wife Rose Fay, when her husband received the score of the March, he was gravely disappointed by the composition and thought it “proved to be so poor that it was practically worthless.”¹²⁸ When the piece was premiered on May 10, 1876, critical reaction was mixed: some praised it to excess, while others thought it was an uninspired effort. Many scholars have since tended to side with the latter group, going as far as to dismiss the march as “a piece of musical tripe” or a “trite potboiler”, though with little detailed justification except that the composer himself did not think highly of the piece.¹²⁹ Notably, they cite Wagner’s response to a telegram from America informing him of the march’s successful premiere, to which he apparently replied with a smile, “Do you know what is the best thing about the march? ...The money I got for it.”¹³⁰ More recently, Brian Doherty has attempted to establish the aesthetic merit of the march, through a close analysis of its score. In his view, the work clearly exhibits Wagner’s skilled derivation and development of the march’s themes from a single motivic idea, and thus, is “more than a perfunctory fulfillment of the commission.”¹³¹ In the following discussion, I build on Doherty’s analysis, and show how the Centennial March exemplifies Wagner’s attempt to apply to the march genre his particular conception of musical-dramatic architecture through thematic recapitulation, an element that already features in many of his operas. I argue that the

¹²⁸ MTT, 111.
¹²⁹ The first description is attributed to Loft, “Wagner, Thomas and the American Centennial”, 191; the latter to Russell, The American Orchestra and Theodore Thomas, 100. Ezra Schabas has since reiterated these opinions in his study, Theodore Thomas: America’s Conductor and Builder of Orchestras.
¹³⁰ Quoted in WW, 509; also in MTT, 117.
Centennial March bears an affinity with the Prelude to Die Meistersinger, in its structure and deployment of thematic material for “dramatic” aims. While the work may have its shortcomings, it is nevertheless a rather sophisticated example of the genre, and fully exhibits Wagner’s mature compositional style.

The Commission

Thomas’s commission for a moving and celebratory march arrived in Wagner’s hands on December 21, 1875. While the composer did not accept straightaway, he was immediately interested. Replying the following day to his acquaintance Gottlieb Federlein (who, now living in New York, had been invited by Thomas to handle the entire transaction), Wagner coyly intimated that something might be worked out with the conductor, in exchange for the guaranteed presence of Americans at the Bayreuth Festival and earnings from the U.S. copyright of the march. As he wrote:

I will say that it is quite possible that for the opening of the American National Festival something may occur to me—perhaps in broad March form—that I can make use of, although I have not written a note of music for a long time, and have quite got out of the way of so-called composing, which you will easily understand. Well, if I send you the thing, I shall expect in return that the Americans will behave well towards me, especially as regards the furtherance of my Festival Plays, which I have postponed with special reference to them to the second half of August, at the cost of considerable trouble in regard to the singers to be engaged. I hope soon to be assured of American visitors. Beyond their interest in this enterprise I ask nothing for my composition except the proceeds of the American copyright.132

Given that many Americans had already purchased Festival tickets and even more had recently solicited him directly for patronage certificates, Wagner’s appeal seems heavy-handed. Yet, his alleged “postponement” of the Ring performances in order to accommodate Americans probably contained a grain of truth: in May 1875, an American named “J.P.T.” had alerted Wagner that the Centennial celebrations the following year might conflict with the Festival schedule, and suggested that he delay the performances until September so as not to “fail

132 WW, 507; also quoted in MTT, 111, and New York Tribune, 17 Apr 1876, 4. This letter is currently held in the city archives in Philadelphia.
almost entirely of the attendance of Americans” to Bayreuth. According to J.P.T., Wagner “acknowledge[d] the value of the suggestion”, but as his artists would be available only in July and August, the most he could do is to “have a repetition of all main performances in the last week of August.”¹³³ Evidently, in his negotiations with Thomas, Wagner thought to use this knowledge to his advantage, while emphasizing that he was not taking for granted the keen support of Americans for his Bayreuth endeavor.

Several days after he sent his response, Wagner appeared to have an attack of remorse about considering the commission at all. On December 27, Cosima noted in her diary that, “[R.] feels disgusted with the composition for America, says it is not worthy of him!” Since Wagner did not start composing the march in earnest until February 9, 1876, it has been speculated that he may have already began to work on it at this time, perhaps sketching a few ideas, but then gave up temporarily.¹³⁴ At the very least, it seems Wagner had not completely decided whether he would accept the assignment and was still toying with whether it would be worth his while. It is possible he wavered because he remembered the circumstances of creating the *Kaisermarsch* in 1871. A commission from the music publishing firm of C.F. Peters, it had been a laborious affair for Wagner. As Cosima’s diary entries from this period attest, her husband initially hesitated to agree to the task (“R. cannot write to order and particularly not a coronation march”) but he later relented, if not for artistic integrity, then for the promised fee of 1,500 francs (“R. has been composing coronation marches during the night; he is thinking a little about it because of the money.”)¹³⁵ This was a situation to which the genesis of the *Centennial March* would be a striking parallel.

Ultimately, it was financial necessity that drove Wagner to accept Thomas’s commission. Cosima had already predicted when the request arrived in December that her husband would

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¹³⁴ See entry on the *Centennial March* in WWV, 528–34; 532. Although it is not known for certain, the sketches in *Einzelskizzen* 1a might date from this period.
¹³⁵ See entries in CWD 1, especially from 30 December 1870 to 16 March 1871, 314–49.
likely agree to it because with Bismarck’s government unwilling to help, he desperately needed the money to pay the mounting bills for the Bayreuth Festival. By February 1876, Wagner’s health had also become too precarious to allow him to conduct many more concerts in the future to raise funds; the commission thus seemed the best solution. On the 8th, he wrote to Federlein confirming that he would, after all, compose a march “of the caliber and character of my Kaiser March,” to be completed by March 15 for an advance fee of $5,000. This was an enormous—even exorbitant—sum. Wagner knew it too, for he immediately justified the amount, asserting that he was already commanding comparable prices for similar works; a Berlin publisher had offered him 3,000 thalers ($2,250 U.S.) for a short composition without any attachment to a national event. He also claimed that Verdi had received the colossal amount of “half a million francs ($100000)” for the unrestricted performance and rights of ownership of his Requiem. This was, in fact, completely erroneous, for Verdi actually received from his publishers 50,000 francs ($10,000) for the mass. Whether this miscalculation was an honest mistake on Wagner’s part or a ploy to assure he got the amount he requested is not clear, but the claim was never questioned, even by Americans. (Indeed, it was subsequently disseminated quite widely in sources discussing the March; the critic of the New York Tribune, John Rose Green Hassard, later used the information to defend Wagner’s terms, writing that they were “not at all unreasonable, considering…the enormous profits realized by very inferior composers. Verdi, for example, received nearly $100,000 from the publisher of his ‘Requiem.’”) Moreover,

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136 The original letter is held at the Newberry Library, Chicago; cf. WW, 507, and MTT, 112. That Wagner was in demand in the 1870s to compose short, commercially viable works was true, though he turned down most requests for artistic reasons. Among the commissions that did not come into fruition include: a cantata for the opening of an industrial exhibition in London, an overture for the music publisher, Peters (for 9,000 marks!), and a mass for an event in Philadelphia.

137 For the rights to his Requiem, Verdi received 35,000 francs from his Italian publisher Ricordi and 15,000 francs from his French publisher Escudier, thus totaling 50,000 francs, or $10,000 US, according to the currency exchange of the period (http://www.cyberussr.com/hcunn/gold-std.html#overview); see David Rosen, Verdi: Requiem, Cambridge Music Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 12. The 35,000 francs from Ricordi is confirmed in a letter by Verdi, in which he states he received 39,000 lire for the mass; see Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, Verdi: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 615. Rosen also points out that Verdi also negotiated to receive substantial royalties on the Requiem, e.g. 50 percent of rental fees paid to the publisher.

138 New York Tribune, 17 Apr 1876, 4. In her translation of Wagner’s letter to her husband, Rose Fay Thomas (in
in a shrewd effort to appear generous and make the fee seem more palatable, Wagner awarded
Thomas and the Women’s Centennial Committee full ownership of the work in the United
States, an amendment to his initial demand for the proceeds from the U.S. copyright. He
promised as well “not to allow the German publication to be issued till six months after the
American.” In closing, Wagner urged Thomas to send a telegram as soon as possible indicating
his approval of these terms.

While he awaited Thomas’s response, the $5,000 fee continued to preoccupy Wagner
as he began labor on the march. Its composition did not come easily as he struggled to find the
appropriate theme to represent “American pomp.” On February 14, Cosima wrote that her
husband “complains of being unable to visualize anything to himself in this composition; […]
here he can think of nothing but the 5,000 dollars he has demanded and perhaps will not get.”

But after just over a week of intense effort, Wagner finished the piano sketch on February 20,
which he played that afternoon for Cosima who deemed it “splendid”. Three days later, he
began orchestrating the draft, though he was stalled by having “to write the first two pages
again!” Steady work on the orchestral score followed, but as Cosima wrote on the 25th, “since
he has had no reply from America, he decides not to hurry himself.” On February 29, progress
halted on the manuscript as Wagner travelled to Vienna, then Berlin, to conduct productions of
Lohengrin and Tristan, respectively. Nearly two weeks later on March 9, an express letter from
Philadelphia arrived while Wagner was still in Berlin: finally, he received confirmation of the
Centennial Committee’s acceptance of his fee and terms. The message galvanized the
composer to resume work on the march in order to meet the proposed March 15 deadline.
Working feverishly in between rehearsals for Tristan, he finished the manuscript on the 17th,
two days after the initial deadline. Meanwhile, the banker Friedrich Feustel relayed to his friends

\[139\] MTT) cites the amount of “$100,000” whereas Finck (in WW) records “half a million francs.”
CWD 1, 892.
the good news from Bayreuth that they were now $5,000 richer.\textsuperscript{140}

Just as the score to the \textit{Centennial March} was about to be shipped abroad, however, Wagner changed his mind about some of the conditions he had first outlined in his February 8 letter. He seemed to have suddenly realized that awarding the Americans right of first release for the work was not in his favor after all. On March 18, he sent the completed score to Paris for dispatch to the United States, with an accompanying letter to Federlein indicating his desired amendments to his previous agreement with Thomas. Instead of allowing a six-month margin between the release of the American and the German publications of the march, he now believed they should be distributed at the same time:

\begin{quote}
I would like to have a definite declaration as to when the score can be issued by my German publishers here. I believe that the publication should be made in Europe at the same time as in America, as this would be keeping with the usual custom in regard to international copyright. And this should be done not only in Germany and America, but also in England.\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

While this letter and the score were en-route to New York, a communication directly from Thomas arrived in Bayreuth. Judging by its contents, the letter must have been delivered much earlier in March but Wagner did not receive it until the 25th, having just returned to \textit{Wahnfried} from Berlin the previous day. According to Cosima’s diary, the conductor had written that “the ladies’ committee in Philadelphia accepts his terms for the march with the single request that the march be dedicated to them.” Wagner immediately responded (by letter on March 25), providing the requested dedication as well as confirmation that the score was on its way to them. He remained adamant though, about modifying the original terms of their agreement. Reiterating his March 18 appeal, he wrote,

\begin{quote}
In regard to the copyright and royalties for America, I would like to confess that I am not in full sympathy anymore with the arrangements previously made, but I promise you to live up to the said agreements. Kindly let me know, in a written document, whatever formalities have to be carried out concerning the copyright, and I will sign and return it to you at my earliest convenience.\textsuperscript{142}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{141} WW, 508; also MTT, 114.
\textsuperscript{142} MTT, 116–17. Fay Thomas’s indication that this letter was written from Berlin is erroneous, as Wagner had
Why was Wagner now insisting to renegotiate the copyright and distribution for his *March* when he had already received his $5,000? Most likely, he saw opportunities to maximize his receipt of the proceeds for the work, and therefore, improve his financial situation vis-à-vis his Bayreuth project. According to Cosima’s diary entry for March 22, her husband was already receiving large offers for the American march from other music publishers though he was already committed to B. Schott and Sons: “Herr Peters 9,000 marks which Messrs. Bote & Bock want to outbid.”¹⁴³ But soon after Wagner dispatched his March 25 letter, he was informed (probably by telegram) that Thomas had been unable to secure a North American publisher for the *March*, and instead, the Centennial Committee was purchasing the manuscript outright for the $5,000 fee. On March 30, Wagner alerted Ludwig Strecker at Schott regarding the circumstances on the American side:

Some two months ago, Music-Director Thomas of New York inquired whether I would do such a composition for him and how much I would ask for making over to him the United States copyright, *plus* royalties on performances. He asked me, should we come to an agreement, not to issue the first German (European) edition until six months after the first performance in America. From Thomas’s letter, which I enclose, you will see that copyright could not be secured in North America and that my composition has been bought purely to adorn the anniversary of some women’s club. Now, you will know best how to enforce the copyright, which I hereby bestow on you, in Europe and where else you have rights, and I am sending you the work as soon as I get it from the copyist. [Josef] Rubenstein will at once prepare a two- and four-hand pianoforte arrangement for you, having often played the march from the full score for the entertainment of my friends.¹⁴⁴

According to this correspondence, Wagner seems to have interpreted the Centennial Committee’s purchase of the *March*’s manuscript as equivalent to buying a souvenir, that is, they had no intentions to make money from it. Perhaps he also assumed that with this recent change in arrangements, i.e. the lack of an American publisher, the original terms were now void (though it appears he did not clarify this with Thomas). Wagner therefore saw no reason to forestall the *March*’s publication in either the orchestral version or Rubinstein’s piano

¹⁴³ *CWD* 1, 899.
¹⁴⁴ *LRW*, 275.
transcription once he made the manuscript available to Schott. The final decision though, he
defferred to Strecker.

Following this exchange, it appears that interactions between Thomas/Federlein and
Wagner either stopped temporarily or their communications from this period are no longer
extant. In any case, the Centennial March manuscript and Wagner’s dedication arrived in
Thomas’s hands in mid-April, in time for the parts to be copied and rehearsed for the opening
ceremony. The music critic of the New York Tribune managed to obtain access to the
manuscript, and with the aim of drumming up anticipation, provided a general and (mostly)
accurate account to Americans about the commission, as well as a detailed analysis of the
score, complete with printed musical examples.\footnote{\textit{See New York Tribune}, 17 Apr 1876, 4; reprinted in the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 19 Apr 1876, 7.} After a well-received public dress rehearsal,
the Centennial March was premiered on May 10, 1876, before an audience of twenty-five
thousand spectators crowded into the Main Building of the exhibition grounds. To fill the
enormous space with the appropriate volume of sound, Thomas had augmented his orchestra
to one-hundred-and-fifty musicians. Critics noted that overall, it was a fairly impressive affair that
generated enthusiastic responses from the audience. The Centennial March was repeated at a
concert the following day, and received a final performance during the exhibition’s closing
ceremony on November 10.

Not long after the March’s premiere, however, the issue concerning the terms of the
American claim on the work came to a head between Wagner and Thomas. With the Centennial
Committee’s purchase of the manuscript in late-March, Thomas assumed that this accorded
them full ownership of the piece in the U.S., and thus, they could do with it what they wanted,
presumably without requiring Wagner’s or Schott’s permission. Desiring to make the most of the
opportunity, he offered to help the women recover the $5,000 they had paid for the March by
publishing and selling his own piano transcription of it. The New York Tribune critic had already
publicized in his April 17 article Thomas’s intentions to create his own arrangement, to be “copyrighted and issued” by the Schirmer publishing firm in New York. Whether Schirmer had actually agreed to it at the time is unknown for ultimately, the Thomas transcription was published by John Church and Co. in Cincinnati. When it was printed, the explicit intent to sell copies for the benefit of the Women’s Centennial Committee appeared as an inscription on the score. Signed by E.D. Gillespie, the President of the Committee, it read:

"The right to publish all arrangements of the Grand March composed by Richard Wagner, and dedicated to the Women’s Centennial Committees of the United States had been purchased by John Church & Co., of Cincinnati, and, by arrangements made with this firm, the Women’s Department of the International Exhibition will be pecuniarily benefitted through the sale of each and every copy of the March." 146

Apart from the Centennial Committee’s purchase of the March, it appears Thomas did not fully disclose to Wagner his personal intentions for the work, perhaps because he considered the composer to have relinquished his American rights to it. Wagner, as already indicated, read the situation differently but did not alert Thomas to his plans. Not surprisingly, their lack of communication soon created an awkward situation. By some means, Thomas discovered that a piano arrangement of the March by Rubinstein was on its way to the U.S. market. Most likely, he learned about it in mid-June, as according to the print log (Druckbuch) of B. Schott and Sons, three hundred copies of the transcription were produced on June 10, 1876 to be sold in the United States through the Schirmer firm. 147 Naturally, Thomas was irked by the news, as now his transcription would have to compete with Rubenstein’s (though exactly when Thomas’s version was made available to the American public is not known.) 148 Sensing that Wagner may have violated their agreement, Thomas must have instructed Federlein to write to the composer about the matter. While this letter is no longer extant, we can probably infer its contents from this existing fragment of Wagner’s response:

146 WWV, 532.
148 At the very least, it did not come out until probably well after the march’s premiere. Deathridge, Geck and Voss think the Thomas transcription may not have been released until after the Rubenstein arrangement had appeared in the U.S. but they are not certain.
All that you write me makes me very sorry, and I regret very much the disappointment of Mr. Thomas. I thought little of the intention of the Ladies’ Society to make money out of my March, because, in buying it for this society, Mr. Thomas wrote me that no American publisher had wanted to undertake it, because the composition of a foreign composer has no international copyright, therefore no compensating profit could be drawn from the work from Europe. The purchase of my work seemed, therefore, an affair of honor on the part of the Ladies’ Society, which presented the work, so to speak to the Centennial Celebration.

I communicated the letter of Mr. Thomas to my publishers, B. Schott Sons, who, having then no hesitation on account of contract rights, which, (according to that letter), did not at all exist, undertook the immediate publication of my work. According to your letter received today there is something else said again. By this it appears that there is an American publisher [presumably this was John Church and Co.] who will undertake to publish the March for an honorarium. I heartily grant this honorarium to Mr. Thomas, or whoever it may be, and I immediately telegraphed to Schott to keep back their transmissions to America, but they answered me that the Rubinstein arrangement had already gone.

I regret this without being able to blame myself, and only hope that Mr. Thomas will, through the exclusive right, which the enclosed document secures to him, find in the course of time a remuneration for his pains. The score will, for the present, not be sent to America.\(^{149}\)

In this letter, Wagner portrays himself as innocent in the entire matter. He insinuated that Thomas was partly to blame for not clearly communicating his plans in full regarding the March’s manuscript. It was Schott, he noted, who determined that given the absence of a U.S. copyright, they saw no reason to forestall their publication of the March. Unfortunately for Thomas, Wagner was somewhat misleading here as it was he who had sanctioned Schott to publish immediately the March’s score and Rubinstein’s arrangement (as according to his March 30 letter to Strecker). Moreover, he had informed Schott before Thomas legitimately had time to respond to Wagner’s request about renegotiating the terms of the copyright and right of first release. Given his shock concerning the appearance of the Rubinstein arrangement well before the end of the six-month margin initially agreed upon, it seems that for whatever reasons, Thomas had not—or not yet—discussed the issue with Wagner (if he did, his correspondence no longer exists). Unluckily, Wagner made the mistake of moving forward with Schott too.

\(^{149}\) MTT, 113–14. According to WWV, the original letter exists only as a fragment, which is currently held at the Newberry Library in Chicago. The exact date it was written is unknown; Rose Fay Thomas indicates February 1876 in MTT but this is clearly erroneous. Given the available evidence, it was probably sent sometime in late June 1876.
quickly, having assumed (wrongly) that the conductor would ultimately agree to the change in terms. The matter was probably still unresolved in June but by then, it was too late: Schott had already sent the three hundred copies of the Rubinstein arrangement to the U.S., though on account of Thomas’s complaint, it appears they were able hold back their release of the orchestral score.\textsuperscript{150}

The American \textit{Centennial March} commission did not end on good terms, at least for the Thomas-Wagner relationship. Ultimately, both, to some extent, suffered from the limitations of transatlantic communication and the ambiguities of international copyright law. Nevertheless, it might be guessed that as his dealings with the composer progressed, Thomas became deeply disillusioned with Wagner, if not for total legal infringement, then for his questionable personal integrity. For his part, Wagner never apologized for his own misstep, though he tried to appear gracious by allowing Thomas the honorarium from the American publisher (presumably, he meant the fee for Thomas’s transcription of the \textit{March}), and awarding him all rights and proceeds from the sale of his arrangement. Alas, this barely compensated for the pains Thomas felt he had endured for a work that he found remarkably disappointing. To add insult to injury, his transcription, in the end, did not sell well and he rarely conducted the piece in public again.

\textit{The Composition}

Apart from the awkward circumstances of its commission, is Wagner’s \textit{Centennial March} really a “trite potboiler?” To be sure, the piece has never become popular, even in America. From its first performance, critical responses were mixed. Some correspondents praised the composition to excess; among them, Hassard and Jackson of the \textit{New York Tribune} and the \textit{New York Herald}, respectively, as well as the critic of the \textit{Philadelphia Press} made lofty comparisons of the \textit{March} to the music of \textit{Die Meistersinger}, \textit{Tristan und Isolde}, and

\textsuperscript{150} According to Schott’s \textit{Druckbuch}, the first printing of the orchestral score took place on 18 June 1876.
Lohengrin. Other critics were more circumspect, such as the reviewer of the New York Times. In his view, the work

...did not inspire very lively admiration. It is altogether devoid of the pomp and circumstance which should characterize an achievement of this sort, and all its beauties as a specimen of orchestral writing do not make amends for the lack of thought which has made recourse to scholastic treatment of a single theme necessary throughout the thirty-three pages of the work. Though written with great breadth, and scored with a richness it were hopeless to improve on, the “Centennial March,” with its deftly-interwoven motives, its promising but disappointing progressions...and its happy contrasts between the instrumental masses, is not to be named in respect of brilliance or life with the “Huldigung” or the “Kaiser” march, although these may be a trifle inferior to the later composition in the matter of skilled development and symmetry. In other words, while the March clearly exhibited Wagner’s great skill in writing for orchestra, it was otherwise emotionally uninspiring, sounding mostly like a compositional exercise on the development of a single motive. The writer Henry T. Finck seemed to agree with this assessment, and moreover, suggested that the work’s main weakness was its opening theme, a diatonically ascending triplet figure which was, in itself, undistinguished:

Wagner too seemed to be aware of its plainness, and thus, was clearly concerned that it might be misinterpreted in performance. At the beginning of the score, specific instructions for its execution are provided, presumably to ensure that the motive is articulated with the appropriate character of “pomp”: “The proper tempo is to be governed by the triplet which, employed throughout thematically, is always to be executed with marked accent and consequently must never be hurried.” Though not printed in the score, he had also advised Thomas in a letter that “The always ponderous and heavy accentuation of the [triplet] should, on the other hand, not lead to a certain dragging of the tempo.”

In Brian Doherty’s view, Wagner skillfully derived from this opening triplet motive virtually all the motivic and thematic material of the composition. As he concludes from his analysis, “In its totality, the march is a fine example of motivic unity. The initial ascent of the triplet motive from dominant to tonic is mirrored in all of the thematic and motivic material in the work.” He notes that “by creating the work this way, Wagner displays an affinity with Beethoven and his skills with motivic development.” 155 While this may be true to an extent, Doherty otherwise misses important affinities of the *Centennial March* with Wagner’s own works. After all, it was composed after the completion of several major operas: *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger*, and the *Ring* cycle. Not unlike these works, Wagner employs in the *March* a musical structure in which thematic recapitulation is used for dramatic aims.

In this respect, the *Centennial March* is somewhat more sophisticated than Wagner’s two other compositions of the same genre, the *Huldigungsmarsch* (1864) and the *Kaisermarsch* (1871). In fact, it is most similar in form and thematic treatment to the Prelude of *Die Meistersinger*. Doherty has already pointed out some of their surface resemblances, including Wagner’s use of “nearly strict diatonicism”, the prominence of the tonic-dominant relationship within the motives, the relatively simple and somewhat similar rhythmic content of the themes, and a clear tonal emphasis throughout. The character of certain motives are also quite similar between the *March* and the Prelude, such as the weighty, almost pedantic quality of their opening themes (i.e. “Theme 1”), and the graceful, soaring lyricism of their contrasting melodies (i.e. “Theme 4”).

More striking is the structural kinship between the *Centennial March* and the *Meistersinger* Prelude, as is made evident by the side-by-side analyses of the two pieces shown in Figure 1.1. Both works begin with a straightforward presentation of several themes in succession, which have been grouped into a primary section (A) and a contrasting section (B).

Figure 1.1. Comparative Analysis of Wagner’s *Centennial March* and the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Key: G+</th>
<th>mm. 1–78</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Themes:    | 1) ascending triplet figure + triadic extension + descending dotted rhythm + dotted motif (a+b+c+d)  
            2) heroic, descending theme (m. 29)  
            3) fanfare in f+1a+c (m. 41)  
            Concludes with return of theme 1 (in D+) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Key: Bb+…</th>
<th>mm. 79–102</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Themes:    | 2) graceful version, alternating with…  
            4) romantic theme representing the “beautiful and talented women of North America” (m. 82) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A’</th>
<th>Key: D+…</th>
<th>mm. 103–200</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Themes:    | 1) constituent motives undergo development; imitation and modulation in p (m. 178)  
            3) in Bb+ (m. 286); in G+ (m. 299)  
            3) + 4) in diminution + triplets; in C+ (m. 311)  
            Grand presentation of 2) in fff (m. 317)  
            Final statement of 1) (m. 335) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section B’</th>
<th>Key: Eb+…</th>
<th>mm. 201–236</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Themes:    | 2) and 4) as before, with accompanying triplet figures  
            Return of 2) in original, martial character but p + crescendo (m. 217) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A”</th>
<th>Key: G+</th>
<th>mm. 237–358</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Themes:    | 1) + Grand pauses; development of d), modulation (m. 259)  
            3) in Bb+ (m. 286); in G+ (m. 299)  
            3) + 4) in diminution + triplets; in C+ (m. 311)  
            Grand presentation of 2) in fff (m. 317)  
            Final statement of 1) (m. 335) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Key: C+</th>
<th>mm. 1–96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Themes:    | 1) stately theme – image of Nürnberg  
            2) graceful, descending theme (m. 27)  
            3) heroic theme of the Meistersingers (m. 40)  
            4) soaring, ascending theme (m. 59)  
            Transition (m. 89) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>Key: E+…</th>
<th>mm. 97–121</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes:</td>
<td>5) Walter’s theme of passion/Prize song</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section C</th>
<th>Key: Eb+…</th>
<th>mm. 122–157</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes:</td>
<td>Variation of 1), depicting chattering apprentices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A’</th>
<th>Key: …C+</th>
<th>mm. 158–222</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Themes:    | 1), 3), 5) combined in counterpoint (m. 158)  
            Variation of 1) in diminution + 4) (m. 178)  
            Grand presentation of 3) with sixteenth and thirty-second note figures in strings (m. 187)  
            Final statement of 1) (m. 211) |
Figure 1.1, cont’d.

Principal Themes/Motives of Centennial March:

1a)  

1) 

2) 

3) 

4) 

Principal Themes/Motives of Die Meistersinger Prelude:

1) 

2) 

3) 

4) 

5)
Afterwards follows a “developmental” episode, though the works are less similar here. In the *March*'s A’ section, the constituent motives of the first theme and later, the third theme, are put through imitation, modulation, and dynamic changes, after which a second (B’) section occurs, this time in E-flat major. By comparison, the *Meistersinger* Prelude has a single episode in E-flat major, which features the opening theme in rhythmic diminution (in the opera, this variation represents the chattering apprentices). Subsequently, both pieces conclude with a final A section in which their respective principal themes return, though not as in the opening, but varied. In the *Meistersinger* Prelude, the first, third, and fifth themes are recapitulated in full counterpoint, not in succession (see Figure 1.2 below). Following this, at m. 178, the first and fourth themes are recapitulated again in counterpoint, this time in diminution (Figure 1.3). The *Centennial March*’s themes also undergo varied recapitulation but Wagner employs different techniques. In the E-flat major B’ section, the second and fourth themes are accompanied by the urgent triplet motive (Figure 1.4), which was previously absent in the first B section. At the return of the A section, grand pauses are incorporated into an extended version of the first theme, after which momentum resumes with a protracted development of the syncopated motive (1d). Theme 2 is not recapitulated but Theme 3 is, first in B-flat major, before returning to the home key of G major in m. 299. This is then followed by a brief contrapuntal treatment of the “fanfare” motive with the fourth theme in rhythmic diminution and the triplet motive, albeit in a less sophisticated manner than in the *Meistersinger* Prelude (Figure 1.5). In both pieces, the varied thematic recapitulations ultimately build to their climaxes, which similarly culminate first, in a grand *fortissimo* presentation of their “heroic” themes (Themes 2 and 3 of the *March* and Prelude, respectively), and closes with a final statement of the opening subject.

It appears likely that Wagner modeled the musical structure and concept of varied recapitulation in his *Centennial March* on the Prelude of *Die Meistersinger*. This is not all that surprising, given that varied recapitulation is a prominent feature in many of his operas. Beyond the Prelude, recapitulation also appears on a larger scale in *Die Meistersinger*, in which the
Figure 1.2. Contrapuntal Recapitulation of Three Themes in *Die Meistersinger* Prelude (mm. 158–60).

Figure 1.3. Contrapuntal Recapitulation of Themes 1 (in diminution) and 4 in *Die Meistersinger* Prelude (mm. 178–80).

Figure 1.4. Return of Themes 2 and 4 with triplet figure in the *Centennial March* (mm. 201–07).

Figure 1.5. Recapitulation of Themes 3 and 4 in the *Centennial March* (mm. 311–13).
primary themes introduced at the opening are recalled extensively in Act III of the opera, during the Procession of the Mastersingers. The composer also employed thematic recapitulation to underscore the dramatic narrative of his operas. In particular, as the opera nears its culmination in the final act or scene, principal themes are not simply recalled, but are developed, combined together, or interwoven in a way to eventually bring the drama to its climax. Although they are instrumental pieces, the Prelude to Die Meistersinger and the Centennial March exhibit this kind of “dramatic” architecture.

The March, in essence, is a microcosm of what Wagner had already accomplished to varying degrees in his operas. While the Centennial March does not have an explicit narrative, he had one in mind as he was composing the piece. In fact, it was a necessary aid, for though Wagner probably already envisioned the march’s overall musical structure by the time he began composing it, developing the appropriate motives and themes proved difficult for him. Being first and foremost a “musical dramatist”, he relied heavily on a narrative or text to inspire and shape his musical material; without either, he felt stumped.156 Knowing little about the United States and its history, Wagner struggled to be suitably stimulated. Cosima’s diary entries from the period document his various frustrations in this vein. Wagner’s young protégé Anton Seidl also recalled how the composer labored over the musical themes for the work. Seidl later relayed the following anecdote to American critic John P. Jackson for The Cosmopolitan magazine:

After [Wagner] had accepted the commission to write the “Centennial March” for the Ladies’ Committee of the Philadelphia Exhibition, he wandered, puzzled to distraction, about the streets of Bayreuth for days, trying to think of leading themes on which to build his musical structure. […] For a long time…he was unable to get any musical themes to work upon. He knew nothing of American history or of national melodies of the country, with the exception of ‘America,” which he knew was the same as the Prussian and English national hymns.157

156 Wagner faced a similar challenge while composing the Kaisermarsch, during which he had complained to Cosima: “I can’t do things when I can’t imagine something behind it. And if I imagine something, it gets out of hand. A march is an absurdity; the most it can be is a popular song, but it is not meant to be sung, which is nonsensical. I must have some great vehicle, on which I can reel off my music; like this I can do nothing.” See CWD 1, 337.

157 “The Ring of the Nibelung,” in The Cosmopolitan 6, no. 5 (Mar 1889): 415–33; 427–429. At the time, “America” was also known by its first line, “My Country ‘Tis of Thee”. It used the same melody as the English anthem, “God Save the King”, and the German anthem, “Heil dir im Siegerkranz”.

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However, once Wagner did find the necessary inspiration, the composition came together quickly for him. According to Seidl, this was how the composer arrived at the dramatic concept for the *Centennial March*:

One day, after taking his accustomed walk in the beautiful surroundings of the old city, he was returning to the city, when he had to pass through a very narrow and gloomy alleyway which ends in a covered archway and leads into the great square or marketplace. Walking through the darksome alley, his thoughts were occupied with a theme for a march which should represent the condition of the country in the dark days when the Revolution broke out and when the people were engaged in the daily struggle against the British. This he had in his mind. Suddenly, while buried in thought, he came out through the archway upon the broad market-place, which was bathed in clear, soft afternoon sunlight. All at once the contrast of the two scenes struck Wagner, and another theme came into his mind. It was as if he himself had left the bonds and fetters of gloom and uncertainty behind and had come into the full radiance of the light of freedom and victory. The contrast he afterward worked out in the "Centennial March." Wagner often spoke of his walk and its results as a "lucky accident." To his friends, when the work was finished, he often expressed the fear that the "March" would not be thoroughly understood, especially if the people had not the "Ideengang" before them. He had...certain musical phrases that signified the struggle for freedom—Washington's call to arms, the incessant battling, and finally the triumph, and at one passage he would exclaim, "Now comes the society of Philadelphia ladies in festal dress, strewing palm branches before the great Washington."

Based on Seidl's description of Wagner's dramatization, one can easily line up "Washington's call to arms" with the march's opening (A) section, the "incessant battling" with the developmental (A') section, the "triumph" with the climactic variation and development of motives in the (A") recapitulation, and the passage depicting the "society of Philadelphia ladies in festal dress" with the themes in the contrasting B sections. Wagner was even unable to resist suggesting the implementation of certain "stage effects" to enhance climactic moments in the *March.* As he had initially recommended to Thomas:

I indicated on pages 23 and 24, two grand pauses, the impressiveness of which could, especially in the first performance, be increased by the discharge of the cannon, as well as muskets, at a place not too near Festival Hall. Perhaps at later performances, the very solemn effect of the artillery could be imitated by the bass drum and the so-called rattles, such as Beethoven used in his "Battle of Vittoria." This, of course, should also sound from a distance, and might be placed in a room adjoining the hall.\(^{158}\)

\(^{158}\) MTI, 115. Thomas did not carry out these instructions for the premiere.
In the end, Wagner did not provide an accompanying description of the *Centennial March* and its performance requirements, a curious decision if he had been concerned about the piece being misunderstood. Even the textual reference inscribed on the first page of the original manuscript—a verse from the second part of Goethe’s *Faust*, which reads “Nur der Verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben / Der täglich sie erobern muss”—barely registered in the press.159 Perhaps Americans might have been—and might still be—more receptive to the *March* should an “explanatory program” along the lines of Seidl’s remarks be made available, to facilitate listening and interpretation of this music. Despite the piece not being immediately appealing, as one often expects good marches to be, it cannot quite be dismissed as a mere “potboiler”. Even Wagner’s opinion of the piece, initially self-conscious and ambivalent, appeared to soften in subsequent years as he occasionally contemplated moving to the “New World.” Writing in her diary on November 22, 1878, Cosima recorded that “R. takes pleasure in the march and thinks one day only the Americans will understand his meaning: “This is the music of the future too!” he says with a laugh and a sigh.”160 Although not as weighty as the music from his operas, the *Centennial March* nevertheless encapsulates more than traces of Wagner’s mature compositional style.

The circumstances surrounding the commission of the *Centennial March* were less than inspiring in terms of Wagner’s overall connection to the United States, but this episode did little to dampen Americans’ interest in the premiere of the *Ring* cycle. When a significant number of Americans made the long journey across the Atlantic to attend the first Bayreuth Festival, they caught the attention of Europeans who, as Thomas hoped, would see this as evidence of “America’s musical progress and appreciation of divine art.”161 To this extent, perhaps both Wagner and Thomas got what they desired after all.

159 This translates as “He only earns the right to freedom and to life / Who daily is compelled to conquer them.” The quotation already appeared in Wagner’s first sketches of the *March* from mid-February 1876; see WWV, 529.
160 CWD 2, 208.
161 *New York Times*, 17 April 1876, 4.
CHAPTER II: Americans in Bayreuth: ‘Pilgrims’ at the 1876 Festival and the Responses of the American Press

“[O]n the day of my arrival, I perceived in the crowd many leaders of the musical world in Europe and America.” -- Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

“There are large numbers of musicians, writers and artists of all types, from all parts of the world, all mingling together and it is impossible to avoid them, wherever one goes. All the great names of Europe and even America have gathered here.” -- Edvard Grieg

After years of hard-won preparation, Wagner’s completed Ring cycle was finally set to premiere in mid-August 1876, at the inaugural Festival in Bayreuth. Like many in Germany and other European nations, Americans had also been waiting in great anticipation for the event, which they helped bring to fruition. With the formation of the first American Wagner Society in New York, they had proudly sent monetary contributions to aid Wagner towards its fulfillment. Now, those who were able to secure tickets to the Festival were setting off on an extended transatlantic voyage to witness the performances. As perhaps the first musical event of its kind to have transnational and transatlantic significance, the Ring’s premiere was one they did not want to miss. It became a defining moment in Americans’ interest, experience, and reception of Wagner’s music.

Part I: American Tourists in Bayreuth

The Festival Fremdenlisten

The 1876 Festival drew an unprecedented number of foreign tourists to Bayreuth, including a considerable number of Americans. In the preceding year, journalists of the international press already anticipated that the town would have to prepare for at least two thousand visitors; by the Festival’s end, some estimated that the number was, in fact, closer to four thousand. To convey the “international” significance of the Festival to their readers, American newspapers printed the names of various members of European nobility, musical

1 Quotations from BEY, 54 and 64.
celebrities, and other cultural glitterati who traveled from afar to see the premiere of the *Ring* cycle.\(^2\) In Bayreuth, Festival organizers attempted to keep track of as many tourists to the performances as possible by creating lists of registered attendees, or *Fremdenlisten*. Comprised of data collected from hotel and police records, the *Fremdenlisten* contain the names, cities of residence, occupations (if available), and the Bayreuth addresses of visitors to the Festival (see Figure 2.1). These lists were subsequently published in booklet form, and sold to the public for a small price (depending on length, one list cost between 5 and 30 *Pfennig*). Those interested presumably purchased them as souvenirs, as a memento and proof of one’s attendance, or perhaps even used to locate and meet other attendees. As a historical artifact, the *Fremdenlisten* provide significant demographic information about the Festival’s audience, and what kind of people were interested in making the long journey to Bayreuth to support Wagner’s endeavor.

Following the model of Hannu Salmi’s analysis of Scandinavian Bayreuth tourists registered on these lists, the data on American visitors can be similarly examined.\(^3\) Today, most of the *Fremdenlisten* from the Festivals of the late nineteenth century are held at the National Archive at the Richard-Wagner-Museum in Bayreuth. Some, unfortunately, have not survived in their entirety, including those for 1876, which lack the entire final cycle of performances from August 24 to 30. Thus, the extant *Fremdenlisten* from the first Festival consist only of list Nos. 1 to 5, which constitute the visitors registered for the first cycle (August 13, 14, 16, 17), and Nos. 6 to 10 for the second cycle (August 20, 21, 22, 23).

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\(^2\) In the American papers, members of foreign royalty reported to be attending the Festival included: the Grand Duke Vladimir and Grand Duchess Helena of Russia, Donna Laura di Minghetti from Rome, the Khedive of Egypt, the Turkish Sultan, and a surprise guest, Emperor Dom Pedro II of Brazil and his wife, who were touring Europe at the time. Franz Liszt, Camille Saint-Saëns, Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and Edvard Grieg were among the famous composers present. See “The Nibelungen Trilogy at Bayreuth,” in DJM 36, no. 14 (14 Oct 1876): 313–15; 313.

\(^3\) See Chapter 7, “Pilgrimage to Wagner”, in *Wagner and Wagnerism in Nineteenth-Century Sweden, Finland, and the Baltic Provinces* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005). My analysis here focuses solely on American visitors in 1876, and later, 1896, whereas Salmi examined the total number of visitors to the Bayreuth Festivals in the late nineteenth century. Albert Lavignac has also compiled the information of French visitors at the Bayreuth Festivals between 1876 and 1902 in his study, *Le voyage artistique à Bayreuth* (Paris: Librarie Delagrange, 1898; 14th ed., repr. 1925). He did not, however, analyze this data in any detail.
### Fremdenliste No. 1.

Erscheint je nach Bedürfniss während der Bühnen-Festspiele. — Preis: 10 Pf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name und Stand</th>
<th>Woher</th>
<th>Wohnt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Otto Gastell mit Frau, Fabrikant</td>
<td>Mainz</td>
<td>Rennweg 249/2a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Sorokoumowsky</td>
<td>Moskau</td>
<td>Kanzleistr. 160.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graf du Moulin mit Gemahlin</td>
<td>Regensburg</td>
<td>Maxstr. 13.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermann Riedel, Solorepetitor</td>
<td>Wien</td>
<td>Opernstrasse 166.</td>
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<tr>
<td>R. C. Dixey mit Familie</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Kulmbacherstr. 605.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lina Meyer, Privatier</td>
<td>Bamberg</td>
<td>Dammallee 406.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Rudhardt mit Frau, Kapellmeister</td>
<td>Riga</td>
<td>Kanzleistr. 117.</td>
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<td>Alexander Faminyen, Tonkünstler</td>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
<td>Ziegelgasse 292.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gertrude Daffner</td>
<td>Niederwyl (Schweiz)</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 26.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franz Gehring, Doctor</td>
<td>Wien</td>
<td>Breitgasse 377—79.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fürst Rudolph von und zu Liechtenstein</td>
<td>Neuborgbach (Nieder-Oestr.)</td>
<td>Kanzleistr. 113.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ernst Schmidt mit Frau, Privatier</td>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>Rennweg 250.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernst Henning, dramat. Lehrer und Literat G. Schirmer</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Rennweg 252.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Käthe Schmidt, Rittmeistersgattin</td>
<td>New-York</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 41.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graf Béla Csánk</td>
<td>Koleschowitz (Böhmen)</td>
<td>Kanzleistrasse 156.</td>
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<td>Kammerjungfer</td>
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<td>Walter Baché, Privatier</td>
<td>London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graf Eberhard von Dankelmann mit Familie</td>
<td>Rodelangen (Pr. Schlesien)</td>
<td>Kanzleistrasse 106.</td>
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<td>und Dienerschaft</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Brautgasse 121.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustav Engel, Professor</td>
<td>Ostrichen (Oberlausitz)</td>
<td>Dammallee 442/3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl Freiherr von Grossdorf, Landwirth</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 41.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnie Hauk, K. Kammersängerin</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Bahnhofstr. 870.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berthold Kellermann, Pianist und Docent</td>
<td>Bamberg</td>
<td>Dürrschnitz 282.</td>
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<td>am Conservatorium</td>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>Spitalgasse 465.</td>
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<td>Frl. Lina und Ottile Mayer</td>
<td>Wien</td>
<td>Rennweg 249/3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Marr, Schriftsteller</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Jos. Standhardtiner mit Gattin, Tochter und Sohn</td>
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<td>Hugo Wittmann, Schriftsteller</td>
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<td>Carl Wallau, Bürgermeister</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Anm.** Die Zusammenstellung der Namen ist nach der Reihenfolge der Anmeldung.

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**Figure 2.1.** A page from the first *Fremdenlisten* of the 1876 Bayreuth Festival. (National Archive, Richard-Wagner-Museum, Bayreuth)
Several considerations must be taken into account when evaluating the data presented in the *Fremdenlisten*.\(^4\) Aside from the missing lists, the information on those still extant is also likely incomplete. Many visitors may not have registered their names and Festival organizers were probably unable to obtain data about every attendee. For example, neither John P. Jackson, the music critic for the *New York Herald*, nor Rudolph Aronson, composer and founding manager of New York’s Casino Theatre, appeared on the lists.\(^5\) Some attendees came with their families, the sizes of which were not always indicated, or had brought maids or servants whose names were usually, but not always, excluded from the lists (though it can be assumed that they did not attend the performances). Americans living abroad in Germany at the time, such as musicians and students, may have registered under their German city of residence, instead of their American origin. Furthermore, the *Fremdenlisten*’s compilers, who were copying this information from handwritten records, made occasional misspellings and misinterpretations. These mistakes sometimes resulted in duplications and other inaccuracies.\(^6\) The *Fremdenlisten* also does not provide an indication of exactly how many performances each registrant saw, or which cycles they attended, since each visitor (or group of visitors) were supposed to register their presence only once.\(^7\) In spite of these various concerns, a socio-cultural demographic analysis of the listed American tourists at the first Bayreuth Festival can still be undertaken with revealing results.

In total, the ten extant *Fremdenlisten* contain the names of over seventy-nine American attendees, as shown in Appendix A.1. It can be assumed that there were probably many more Americans than those registered; the critic for the *New York Tribune* reported that he spotted

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\(^4\) Salmi also covers some of these points in his discussion on pp. 178–79 of his study.


\(^6\) For instance, the record for Mr. “Huntington” and his wife from Cincinnati staying at Dürrschnitz 282, was both duplicated and contains spelling errors. They were recorded on List No. 6 (21 August) as “F.G. Kuntington” but on List No. 9 (23 August) as “Huntington”. See footnotes in Table 2-1 for further explanation of additional errors.

\(^7\) Some duplicate entries were made; for example, Alfred A. Wheeler from San Francisco, living at Opernstrasse 164, appeared on *Fremdenlisten* Nos. 6 and 10.
over a hundred and fifty Americans at the start of the Festival and he speculated that “more would likely show up before the end.” Whatever the exact total, the sum of registered Americans alone indicates they were the largest group of foreigners, certainly from outside Europe, but also surpassing the numbers of some European nations (see Figure 2.2). Indeed, their considerable number surprised some Europeans, like Kaiser Wilhelm, who upon his arrival in Bayreuth, asked Wagner to confirm whether it was true that so many Americans had come this far to witness the premiere of the Ring. Moreover, the American presence must have been quite conspicuous around the town’s center. According to the Bayreuth addresses printed on the Fremdenlisten, the majority of them had their accommodations near there, with some even sharing the same residences (see Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.2.** Comparison of National Origins of Foreign Visitors to the 1876 Bayreuth Festival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/City of Origin</th>
<th>No. of Attendees</th>
<th>Country/City of Origin</th>
<th>No. of Attendees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Germany</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>United States</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>233(+)</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munich</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leipzig</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>60(+)</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Austria</strong></td>
<td>185</td>
<td><strong>Russia</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>England</strong></td>
<td>97</td>
<td><strong>Belgium</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 *New York Tribune*, 28 Aug 1876, 1; this article is dated August 13.
9 These numbers were taken from Albert Lavignac’s list of French visitors to the Bayreuth Festival published in *Le voyage artistique à Bayreuth* (Paris: Librarie Delagrave, 1897); see pp. 549–50. In his preface to the lists, Lavignac stated he compiled them from the Fremdenlisten, while acknowledging their incomplete and error-filled nature. For the 1876 Festival, the ten extant Fremdenlisten shows only 34 French attendees (28 from Paris) but Lavignac may have had access to the (now-missing) lists for the third cycle, or to other records, thus, resulting in the larger totals shown here.
Americans on the Fremdenlisten: A Demographic Analysis

Nearly all American attendees on the Fremdenlisten registered their American city of origin. Of these, over two-thirds came from Boston (29) and New York (27). These numbers appear to match the Tribune critic’s observation that most of the Americans he met in Bayreuth came from those two cities, some of whom he recognized as “twenty-five or thirty acquaintances of my own.” This is perhaps not surprising given the Wagner society in New York and that more regular performances of Wagner’s music occurred in these two cities than elsewhere in the United States. The correspondent for the Boston Daily Advertiser even alluded to a kind of

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10 The only notable exceptions were the singer Minnie Hauk, and Trentis Webster, the General Consul of America, who both registered as coming from German cities. Gustav Stöckel was registered as coming from “U.S.A.,” but if he had chosen to be more specific, he would have likely indicated “New Haven”, as he was a professor at Yale University.

civic rivalry in their level of devotion to Wagner:

In fact, the majority of the Americans here are from Boston and nearly all the others are from New York. In spite of the Wagner Verein of the latter city and the active efforts of Theodore Thomas, only nine thousand marks worth of tickets were taken there, while in Boston tickets to the extent of over twelve thousand marks were disposed of through the efforts of Mr. B.J. Lang alone, and many Bostonians besides obtained their tickets directly.\(^{12}\)

Outside of Boston and New York, there were at least five visitors from the West Coast (one from Portland, Oregon, and four from San Francisco), five from cities throughout New York State (one each from Buffalo and Geneva; three from Brooklyn), and one each claimed New Jersey, New Orleans, and Washington as their hometowns. Surprisingly, according to the extant lists, no Americans from Chicago seem to have made the journey, although the Midwest region was represented by four visitors from Cincinnati.

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Although Fremdenlisten data concerning the various professions of American visitors is less complete, the available information does suggest that the majority of them worked in artistic, intellectual, and business-related occupations, which, in the late nineteenth century, were considered to be middle-class vocations. Among the identifiable occupations listed, six were journalists, four were professors and teachers, two each of bankers and businessmen, and one was a lawyer. Music professions, including performers, teachers, instrument makers, and publishers, were the most represented with thirteen in total. This higher representation of the middle class among the American Bayreuth attendees was, in part, due to the lack of a nobility in the U.S. (By comparison, many of the European visitors were aristocrats or members of royalty.) Only eight registered Americans, along with their families, appeared to be of greater social standing according to their relative affluence. One listed himself as a “privatier”, or person of independent wealth. The other seven were registered as “rentiers”, which, in the

\(^{12}\) “The Wagner Trilogy: Conclusion of the Great Composer’s Masterpiece,” Boston Daily Advertiser, 4 Sep 1876, col. B.
nineteenth-century definition of the term, were wealthy individuals who lived on the income from property or investments.\textsuperscript{13}

The strong presence of middle-class Americans among the Bayreuth attendees appears to have contradicted the expectations of some foreign critics that only the wealthy could afford tickets. Karl Frenzel of the German \textit{National-Zeitung}, for example, criticized the aristocratic and bourgeois make-up of the audience, complaining that “large masses of the people have been totally prevented from taking part in this activity.”\textsuperscript{14} But while the moneyed elite were present, the core audience at the Festival was, in fact, middle-class, comprised of businessmen, composers, musicians, professors, writers, and women. This distribution was apparently unusual enough that several journalists found it worth mentioning in their reviews. Among them, the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg shared that he was impressed by the relatively diverse composite of attendees, which he observed to be “from all social classes, the gentry in their grand attire and jewels, young fanatical intellectuals and hundreds of artists and musicians of all kinds, all united by the excitement of the unique occasion.”\textsuperscript{15} Gustav Engel of the \textit{Vossische Zeitung} noted as well the sizable attendance of “members” of the “financial world”, and that “above all…the musical, literary, and theatrical worlds of Germany, indeed of other countries, have appeared in comprehensive numbers. From all sides stream in the capellmeister, the composers, the virtuosi, the critics…”\textsuperscript{16}

But how affordable was it for Americans of these middle-class professions to attend the first Bayreuth Festival? While it was certainly not cheap, it was not entirely beyond their reach. At the very least, the lottery system of patronage certificates offered through the Wagner Societies probably made the experience more affordable for some of them. According to the


\textsuperscript{15} From BEY, 66.

\textsuperscript{16} Quoted from \textit{First Nights at the Opera}, by Thomas Forrest Kelly (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 260.
*New York Times*, a single seat to all three cycles cost 225 American dollars.\(^\text{17}\) This was slightly less than the cost of an inexpensive seven-octave square grand piano by the U.S. Piano Company in 1876, a popular instrument in middle-class homes.\(^\text{18}\) However, most Americans probably attended a single cycle only, for $75. On the one hand, this price might seem quite expensive compared to seeing one opera performance, or even four of them, in New York, where the highest-priced single tickets cost five dollars at the Academy of Music. Yet, interested Americans probably felt that the “extraordinariness” of being physically present at the *Ring* cycle’s premiere was worth the considerable expense.

To get a better sense of the affordability of the Bayreuth Festival, it may be beneficial to consider here the income of a middle-class American. Although there are few studies of middle-class wages in the U.S. and even fewer about musicians’ incomes, some figures gleaned from various sources can help us construct a basic picture of the financial situation of several professions. Among music-related vocations, piano makers at this time were highly paid workers; the brothers C.F. Theodor and William Steinway of Steinway and Sons were particularly successful and became wealthy.\(^\text{19}\) Musicians’ earnings, however, varied considerably. Orchestral musicians probably had the lowest incomes. As they were not salaried employees, they were compensated by whatever dividends came from the profit made by the ensemble for each concert season; because this amount usually fluctuated, they often had to eke out a living, playing in multiple ensembles. For example, a musician in the New York Philharmonic Society, which had approximately sixty members, might earn as high as $400 from an especially lucrative concert season (like in 1869–1870 when receipts peaked at over $25,000), or as low as $30 for an entire series of six concerts (as in 1876, when a nation-wide

\(\text{17} \) *New York Times*, 26 Aug 1876, 1.
financial depression affected concert attendance).\textsuperscript{20} Soloists who performed with the orchestra usually received $50 or $100 in compensation, if they were not asked to donate their services. Singers, however, could ask for substantially more (from $300 to $500 per engagement), and even some star singers at the Academy of Music could make over $5,000 a month if employed by a successful company.\textsuperscript{21} Conductors’ incomes, which used to vary according to a season’s profits, were more stable by the 1870s, when they began to be paid a salary. At the Philharmonic Society, for instance, Carl Bergmann started with steady earnings of $500 per season, which soon increased to $1,000 per season.\textsuperscript{22} In sum, an orchestral musician with an especially successful career might have been able to save enough funds to purchase tickets to the Festival, but it is more likely they had to rely on their luck with the Wagner Union’s lottery scheme. Soloists and conductors, on the other hand, probably earned enough disposable income to buy tickets. As the extant \textit{Fremdenlisten} show, it was this category of musician who attended the Festival.

Critics also formed a notable part of the American audience in Bayreuth. By 1876, journalists working for major American newspapers were salaried professionals; those sent to report on the \textit{Ring} cycle’s premiere most likely had their expenses paid for by their respective organizations. According to the “Town Crier”, Frederick Schwab of the \textit{New York Times} was one of the highest paid dramatic critics in New York during the mid-1870s, with a weekly salary of thirty-five dollars; only the \textit{New York Herald}’s reviewer was paid more.\textsuperscript{23} Papers who did not have a salaried music critic, or could not afford one, found enterprising writers to report on the

\textsuperscript{22} Shanet, \textit{Philharmonic}, 131.
\textsuperscript{23} By comparison, William Winter at the \textit{Tribune} made twenty-five dollars per week and Mr. Sigel for the \textit{Staats-Zeitung} made only twelve dollars per week. The salaries for music critics were probably on a similar scale. See John Rothman, \textit{The Origin and Development of Dramatic Criticism in the New York Times, 1851–1880} (New York: Arno Press, 1870), 17.
performances for them in exchange for subsidies to cover travel expenses to Bayreuth. Such was the case with the conductors Leopold Damrosch and Adolf Neuendorff, who reviewed the Festival for the *New York Sun* and the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, respectively. The young, aspiring critic, Henry T. Finck, was similarly engaged for the *New York World*.

For his part, Damrosch had desperately longed to attend the Festival to support Wagner, a close family friend. At the time, however, he could not afford to go to Bayreuth nor did he win one of the lottery tickets, but his "old friend", the New York music publisher Gustav Schirmer, offered to loan him five hundred dollars for the trip. Coincidentally, another acquaintance, Charles Dana, who was then the editor of the *New York Sun*, “asked him to write some articles on his Bayreuth experiences, and paid him another five hundred dollars, so that my father was liberally supplied with funds for his trip to Europe”, as Damrosch’s son Walter recalled. Due to this good fortune, Damrosch was able to arrive in Bayreuth at the beginning of August, early enough to attend the dress rehearsals, and stay through the first cycle of performances.

Finck, too, had a lucky break. While a student at Harvard, he had become acquainted with Wagner’s music through the concerts of the “big orchestras in Boston”, and had even studied the scores to the *Ring* operas. Now a newly-minted graduate in search of adventure, he was determined not to miss the Festival. According to his autobiography, his uncle lent him five hundred dollars for the purpose but Finck hoped to repay him by writing newspaper and magazine articles about his trip. In the end, he was engaged by John Fiske of the *New York World*, a minor paper at the time, to write a series of reports on the performances, and by W.D. Howells, who requested a lengthy exegesis for the *Atlantic Monthly*. Like Damrosch, Finck also attended the dress rehearsals as well as the first and third cycles. He had, in fact, accidentally paid for all twelve performances, much to his chagrin. As he recalled in

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amusement, “in my reckless enthusiasm I had bought three “Patronatsscheine”, covering all twelve of the performances! Evidence that I had first claim on the Nobel Prize for unmitigated foolishness!”

Clearly, he felt spending nearly half his uncle’s loan was irresponsible. Fortunately, he found a fellow American to take advantage of his tickets to the second cycle: his Harvard classmate, A. A. Wheeler, who was on assignment for the New York Nation, and wanted to see the Ring operas a second time.

Based on these two cases, it appears that the $500 budget that was afforded Finck and Damrosch, though no small sum, quite comfortably covered the cost of tickets to one cycle of performances as well as their accommodation and travel expenses. Lodging in Bayreuth was relatively affordable, although reports indicated that the huge demand for rooms raised prices. According to Hassard, a room in Bayreuth that was normally priced at a mark and a half (37 cents) per night had increased to 14 or 15 marks (between 3 and 4 U.S. dollars) during the Festival. To be sure, this was still, on average, less than a hotel in New York City. Transatlantic travel in the mid-1870s had also become significantly cheaper; a downturn in trade and immigration while the number of available shipping lines increased substantially lowered ticket prices during this period. The General Transatlantic Company, for example, offered some of the lowest fares from New York to Havre: a first-class cabin could be had for $100, a second-class cabin for $65, and the $35 third-class ticket was well within the means of privileged university graduates like Henry T. Finck.

Along with cheaper ticket prices, advancements in steamship technology produced vessels that enabled faster and safer passage across the Atlantic. On average, it took ten days to cross from New York to Liverpool, with some ships able to complete the trip in as quickly as seven days. Because New York and Boston were major ports, it is not surprising that a larger

27 Finck, My Adventures, 122.
proportion of American Bayreuth attendees in 1876 were from those two cities. With the completion of the transnational railway in the late 1860s, they also became much more accessible to Americans from other cities, including as far west as San Francisco. Yet, even though these improvements in railway and steamship travel did probably ease the pilgrimage of Americans to Bayreuth, that they were willing to endure a ten-day trip across the Atlantic, not to mention additional travel across the U.S., through Europe, and within Germany, is nevertheless a strong indication of their interest and commitment to Wagner’s cause.

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The gender distribution of American attendees registered on the *Fremdenlisten* is also particularly revealing. Of the total, just over half were men, and the remainder, women. It is perhaps not surprising there were a greater number of men, especially since those in the journalistic and academic professions (e.g. critics, professors) were almost always male. While some of them traveled alone, others were accompanied by their wives, mothers, sisters or daughters. Among the American female registrants, a striking number of them (around seventeen) are listed as being by themselves. Nearly half of them were unmarried (identified by the use of the prefix “Miss”), while the rest were comprised of several married women who appeared to have traveled unescorted (registered as “Mrs.” or “Madame”) as well as those who did not specify their marital status. These women might have journeyed alone but more likely, they traveled in groups. Many of them stayed together at the same accommodations in Bayreuth; for example, the three Bostonians Anna Blake, Alice Twombly, and Lucretia Jamon lived at Maximillienstrasse 16. Like the single female tourists identified in Hannu Salmi’s study of Scandinavian and Baltic attendees, the willingness of American women to travel without male companions was indicative of a burgeoning spirit of female independence at this time. As one

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proudly proclaimed in a letter to the *Cincinnati Gazette*, she had went to Bayreuth with four other “strong-minded women of the nineteenth [century].”

In general, these women were probably of upper- or upper-middle-class status, as they had the leisure to travel abroad to an event such as the Bayreuth Festival. At least three of them, all unmarried, were registered as “rentieres”. Also among these female attendees were students, often of music, who, like their male counterparts, traveled to Europe for advanced education. One such young American woman, visiting from Frankfurt where she had been studying the piano, wrote about her excursion to the Bayreuth Festival in a letter subsequently published in the September 1876 issue of *Dwight’s Journal of Music.* Her wide-eyed impressions of the town, the visitors, and the performances no doubt resonated with many others’ experience of the event.

The considerable feminine presence at the Festival drew rather derisive commentary from certain prominent (European) men. They felt that these women’s overwhelming support for Wagner arose from their uncritical worship of the composer rather than from an intellectual understanding of his works. Among others, the composer Tchaikovsky, in a letter to the *Russky Viedomosty* newspaper, delineated “true” and “false” Wagner enthusiasts along the lines of gender:

Wagner has, of course, a great many sincere and enthusiastic devotees among professional musicians. These, however, came to a conscious enthusiasm by means of study and if Wagner is to get any moral support in seeking out his Ideal it will be through the warm-hearted devotion of these people. It would be interesting to discover if Wagner is able to differentiate them from the horde of false admirers—the women in particular—who from their standpoint of ignorance are impatiently against all those who do not share their opinions.

Joseph Bennett, the noted English music critic and special correspondent for London’s *Daily Telegraph*, made similar jibes about the female American attendees. At the feast established in Wagner’s honor after the first cycle of performances, he described them as “enthusiastic

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34 BEY, 56.
Yankee ladies, in a chronic stage of ecstasy about ‘darling Liszt’ whose shadow they hoped would fall upon them by-and-by."\(^{35}\) When Wagner artfully refused to sit at an assigned place of honor and chose instead to sit among his artists, Bennett offered this unflattering comment about their response: “The coup met with the success it deserved, and the American ladies near me had such an aggravation of ecstasy as could only be relieved by copious notes in dainty pocket-books.”\(^{36}\)

What do these derogatory remarks against the fairer sex imply? To an extent, they reflect the anxiety and suspicion some male critics had about certain aspects of Wagner’s operas. For them, great musical works first and foremost engaged the intellect, and thus restrained the emotions from overwhelming this process. Wagner’s music, however, verged on decadence because of its undeniable emotional power. In pointing out that women in particular were more susceptible to its influence, these critics were using gendered discourse as a way of articulating their disparagement of all uncritical worshippers of Wagner and his works. Furthermore, Bennett’s observations, as quoted above, seemed to also be a veiled critique of the American response to Wagner (i.e. he specifically mentioned American women, not English women). Essentially, he insinuated that Americans’ enthusiastic support of the composer and his music was characteristic of a nation that, at the time, was perceived to be a cultural backwater, and the people, impressionable and indiscriminate in matters of musical taste.

Despite the gender-biased commentary of Bennett and other men, it is quite possible to see the 1876 Bayreuth Festival as a catalyst for the proto-feminist tendencies of the late nineteenth century. In the U.S. during the 1880s and 90s, various upper-class women established associations which enabled them to have an influential role on American musical culture at a time when they were barred from the top management positions of opera houses.

\(^{35}\) Op. cit., 146. \(^{36}\) Op. cit., 148. By contrast, the American writer Willa Cather provided a much more sympathetic view of American women in Bayreuth in her novel, *The Song of the Lark*: “the group of young women […] followed Wagner about in his old age, keeping at a respectful distance, but receiving now and then a gracious acknowledgement that he appreciated their homage.” (New York: Penguin Group, 1915; rpt. 1991), 244.
and symphony halls. Many of these organizations sought to foster the appreciation of Wagner’s music as part of their mission to cultivate and edify Americans, especially women.  

On the one hand, the progressive aims of groups like Laura Langford’s Seidl Society, which Joseph Horowitz has examined, did encompass a darker, more subversive component, through which American women sought in Wagner’s music “intense experiences” that provided them an outlet from genteel culture’s restrictive conventions regarding female sexuality. However, there was clearly an intellectual and edifying purpose behind their Wagner-related endeavors as well, given that these women’s clubs were also devoted to the study of serious art music. Such societies later became the primary promoters of the “lecture-recital” and organizers of concerts, aimed at helping women (and men) gain a better appreciation for Wagner’s operas, especially the Ring cycle. As Harold Briggs has noted,

Many women’s clubs were founded in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with “Culture” as their guideword. Membership was concentrated within “high society” circles and knowledge of the Ring Cycle’s leitmotivs was considered an essential step in music comprehension.

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One important dimension of the registered American attendees to consider is the significant number of European-Americans among them, the result of recent waves of mass immigration. Many were musicians who moved to the United States looking to expand their employment opportunities, such as the Hungarian-born tenor Francis Korbay (1846–1913), who had a lucrative career in his adopted country from 1871 to 1894, and the Swiss Karl Klauser (1823–1905), a piano teacher and arranger who worked in New York and in the wealthy community of Farmington, Connecticut. Others in attendance at the Festival had established

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38 See Horowitz’s discussion in Chapter 12 of Wagner Nights and also his article, “Finding a “Real Self”: American Women and the Wagner Cult of the Late Nineteenth Century,” in The Musical Quarterly 78, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 189-205.

careers on both sides of the Atlantic, like the pianists Anna Mehlig (1846–1928) and Max Pinner (1851–1887), both pupils of Franz Liszt at one time.\(^{40}\) Mehlig, a specialist of Chopin, toured the United States between 1869 and 1873, and Pinner was a well-known recitalist in New York. There were also American-born musicians living in Europe: the soprano Minnie Hauk (1851–1929) was sought after in Vienna and Berlin for German operatic roles. She would later return to New York to sing for one season (1890–1891) at the Metropolitan Opera House.

A substantial group among the American visitors to Bayreuth consisted of German-born music professionals who had left their homeland permanently for the U.S. Among them were Gustav Schirmer (1829–1893) of the American music publishing firm, and Theodore Steinway (1825–1889) of the famous family of piano makers. (Steinway had given Wagner a gift of a concert grand earlier that year, an instrument held today in the Music Room at Wahnfried.)\(^{41}\)

The Bavarian organist Gustav Stöckel (1819–1907) arrived in 1848, like many of those affected by the failed revolutions; he went on to found the music program at Yale University.\(^{42}\) The pianist, Ferdinand von Inten (1848–1918), and the conductor Adolf Neuendorff (1843–1897) had varied careers in New York. Inten worked predominantly as a chamber musician, and often performed with Theodore Thomas and Leopold Damrosch. Neuendorff, at the time, was the manager of the Germania Theatre, a venue he recently founded for the performance of German-language spoken drama and opera; he also worked as a church organist and choir conductor. Still others had close connections to Wagner himself, including the above-mentioned Leopold Damrosch, and Gottlieb Federlein (1835–1922), a Bavarian vocal teacher. Germans and German-Americans might have been aware of the latter’s recently-published motivic analyses of Das Rheingold and Die Walküre, which had received the composer’s approval.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) Mehlig’s and Pinner’s names did not appear on the extant Fremdenlisten, but were seen at the Festival by Hassard of the New York Tribune; see New York Tribune, 14 Aug 1876, 1. Francis Korbay was also a former pupil of Liszt’s and his god-son as well.

\(^{41}\) Wagner received the new “centennial” model in 1876, which he kept specifically for his own private use.


\(^{43}\) “Das Rheingold” von Richard Wagner. Versuch einer musikalischen Interpretation des Vorspiels zum “Ring des
Federlein’s studies were the predecessors of Hans von Wolzogen’s popular leitmotivic guide, which was published for the 1876 Festival.

Most importantly, these Germans considered themselves American, rather than German. This strongly suggests they did not share the opinion that the Bayreuth Festival was exclusively of German nationalistic significance, as made poignantly evident in the published remarks of Damrosch and Neuendorff. Damrosch, a German Jew who had only recently immigrated to the United States in 1871, made his allegiance clear to American readers of the New York Sun, proclaiming that “…as an American, I am proud that my adopted country will be both in quantity and quality so well represented among the audience.”44 Neuendorff too was clearly inclined to regard the Festival as not a solely German endeavor, but as an event of international importance and character. As he commented in the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung:

Why one should insist on calling the festival a national event is not clear to me. In my view one would have to call it an international event. Many countries were represented, and music is indeed a sacred thing for everyone, provided that one has a feeling and heart for it.—Thus [it is] international, embracing the whole globe from north to south, from east to west. Let those who come from remote areas seize the right to be enthused by a sublime thing! Music is indeed equally understood regardless of language.45

Such comments evidently indicate a desire to neutralize the German overtones of the Festival, which had been heavily promoted by Wagner and by J. Zimmermann and Heinrich Porges in their press releases for the event, as Nicholas Vaszonyi has recently discussed.46 Moreover,

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44 New York Sun, 26 Aug 1876, 2.
45 New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 5 Sep 1876, 5. The original German is as follows: Warum man eigentlich darauf besteht, das Fest ein nationales nennen zu wollen, ist mir nicht recht erklärlich, meiner Ansicht nach hätte man es ein internationales nennen sollen, denn es waren aller Herren Länder vertreten, und die Musik ist doch für einen Jeden, er mag her sein, wo er will, eine gleich geheimte Sache, vorausgesetzt, dass er überhaupt Gefühl und Herz dafür hat.—Also international, den ganzen Erdball vom Norden bis zum Süden, vom Osten bis um Westen umfassend, lasse man dem, der hinter’m Busch wohnt, doch auch das Recht, sich für eine so erhabene Sache zu begeistern! Die Musik ist ja in allen Sprachen gleich verständlich.
they reveal the ambivalence with which German-Americans seemed to regard their country of origin, even after its unification in 1871. The republican-minded Damrosch, for instance, was compelled to immigrate to the U.S. due to his mounting frustration with the dampened conditions of musical life in Breslau under Prussian rule. On the other hand, Neuendorff’s statement in the Staats-Zeitung points to an attempt to universalize the importance of the Bayreuth Festival for Americans. Other critics even promoted the notion that Wagner’s Ring project belonged more to “foreigners”, i.e. Americans, who had given their full support for its successful realization, than to a nation of supposedly indifferent Germans. As one journalist claimed in the Boston Daily Advertiser:

Wagner found among his countrymen indifference, coldness amounting to aversion…He looked abroad for sympathy, and found it. The musical spirit which has enabled him to carry out this unique and interesting enterprise on so grand a scale, and so successfully, is not German, or national in any sense, but cosmopolitan; it is as wide as the world.

Part II: The American Press Reception of the 1876 Festival

The cosmopolitan quality of the 1876 Bayreuth Festival was perhaps best exemplified by the unprecedented number of foreign journalists present to report on the premiere of the Ring cycle. The critic for the New York Herald observed “about sixty correspondents of American, German and other newspapers present.” Similarly, the special correspondent for the Chicago Daily Tribune wrote that he heard the “host of critics” was divided as follows: “London and Paris, eighteen each, Berlin twenty, Vienna fifteen, American fourteen, not to mention individual representatives of countless newspapers.” Several studies have examined some of these printed responses, including Herbert Schneider’s recent consideration of the Festival as an “international media event.” Although Schneider uniquely attempted to compare the reactions

47 As recalled by Walter Damrosch in My Musical Life, 8–9.
48 Boston Daily Advertiser, 5 Aug 1876, col. A.
49 New York Herald, 14 Aug 1876, 2.
50 Chicago Daily Tribune, 17 Sep 1876, 12.
51 Schneider, “Die Eröffnung der Bayreuther Festspiele 1876 als internationales Medienereignis,” 165–217. On the
of various national media, he only surveyed European periodicals, while American perspectives were excluded from his discussion. I aim to fill this gap by providing here an overview of the American critical response to the Ring cycle’s premiere, as published in major U.S. newspapers.

A seminal moment for American music criticism, it was the first time journalists were sent abroad specifically to report on a European musical event. Their detailed accounts helped to initiate most Americans at the time into the visual and musical elements of the Ring operas. The content of these reports were thus crucial in shaping Americans’ initial understanding of the cycle and its staging, and in turn, would later affect the Ring’s future presentation and reception in the U.S.

**Newspapers and Critics**

The American newspapers that dispatched reporters to the Bayreuth Festival are summarized in Appendix A.2. As shown here, the city of New York had the greatest representation, including the three leading dailies—the Herald, the Tribune, and the Times—which employed professional critics to review the performances. While these journalists usually left their articles unsigned, they have since been identified as John P. Jackson (for the Herald), John Rose Green Hassard (Tribune), and Frederick Schwab (Times).


52 My identification of Hassard and Schwab is based on earlier research completed by H. Earle Johnson, in FP, 397–98, and Mark McKnight, “Music Criticism in the New York Times and the New York Tribune,” 1–34. The identity of Jackson as the Herald’s critic was revealed in his article “The Ring of the Nibelung” for the popular magazine, The Cosmopolitan; see Vol. 6, no. 5 (March 1889): 415–33.
Wheeler’s published accounts are no longer extant). Outside of New York, the Boston Daily Advertiser had its German correspondent, Sylvester Baxter, and the Chicago Daily Tribune a critic named “W.”, report on the Festival. There might have been other American papers and critics in Bayreuth but lesser periodicals that did not send writers usually reprinted what was published in the major dailies. The total number of American critics at the Bayreuth Festival is unknown, but their presence was substantial enough to provoke remarks by foreign writers. According to Paul Lindau, the Berlin critic of Die Gegenwart, “American newspapers were more strongly represented than any other foreign journals.”

Fortuitously for Americans, the 1876 Bayreuth Festival coincided with the first application of Thomas Edison’s two-way transatlantic electrical telegraph. The device made it possible to transmit a performance review from Europe that night to the U.S. for printing in the following day’s newspapers. This was vastly more efficient than mailing the article, which, sent via steamship across the Atlantic, could take up to one or two weeks after the event to be published. The new technology caused great excitement, as Dwight observed:

[T]hanks to the enterprise of the New York press, we have had daily rather full reports by cable telegraph, so that we read at breakfast the next morning of the ecstacies experienced away off in the middle of Germany the evening before. Indeed the most remarkable thing about the whole event so far seems to consist in the importance given it by newspapers and in the extraordinary amount of enthusiasm transmitted through the ocean wires by half a dozen of their reporters.

Jackson of the Herald was among those who eagerly made use of the device and had each of his lengthy articles cabled to the U.S. The speed with which his reviews were transmitted was a point of pride for the newspaper. As Rudolph Aronson remembered:

After the Wagner performance I aided Jackson in preparing his criticism on the work. That the cable might be retained until we had completed our review, and his paper thus receive the first news in America of this great event, Jackson gave the operator a few hundred meaningless words to send over and we rushed the preparation of our

54 Schwab reported he learned that “a letter mailed to London [from Bayreuth], at 3 o’clock in the morning would be delivered at 5 o’clock in the afternoon of the morrow”, after which it would be carried by steamship back to New York, a trip that was between seven and ten days long. See New York Times, 26 Aug 1876, 1.
message. The result of this clever and expensive expedient was that the newspaper scored a beat in its notice of the greatest musical event of the century.\textsuperscript{56}

Hassard and Schwab capitalized on column space by wiring short reviews and mailing longer, more detailed discussions for publication at a later date. This explains the different publication dates of their articles. For example, Schwab’s reviews for the first cycle of performances—on August 13, 14, 16, and 17—appeared on the first page of the following day’s \textit{New York Times} (i.e. August 14, 15, 17 and 18), while his longer articles were subsequently published on August 27 and 31, and September 1 and 2.

Critics who did not utilize the telegraph devised other strategies of communicating about the event and transmitting their reports abroad. In order to supply more-or-less immediate coverage, some newspapers chose to reprint the already-transmitted reviews from the New York \textit{Tribune} and \textit{Herald}, while they waited for responses from their own critics. This was the case with the \textit{Boston Daily Advertiser}, whose correspondent, Sylvester Baxter, must have either mailed his reports or returned to the U.S. with them after the performances since they were published nearly a month after the Festival (on September 4, 14, and 15). The extra time also enabled him to organize his articles differently from his New York counterparts. Instead of giving chronological, moment-by-moment descriptions of the performances, Baxter provided his readers with a broad survey of their key features, including a summary of his impressions of the Festival context, an analysis and assessment of the cycle’s music; and an evaluation of the singers. On the other hand, weekly and monthly journals did not send correspondents to the Festival though some devoted extensive column space to a cross-section of reportage instead. Dwight himself, for instance, did not travel to Bayreuth, but collected and reprinted for his \textit{Journal of Music} an assortment of reviews about the \textit{Ring’s} premiere, as published in American and foreign papers. His main sources included New York’s \textit{Tribune} and \textit{Times}, as well as the articles of Joseph Bennett for London’s \textit{Daily Telegraph}, and Eduard Hanslick for Vienna’s

\textsuperscript{56} Aronson, \textit{Theatrical and Musical Memoirs}, 11.
Readers of the *Journal* were therefore able to compare, to an extent, the various perspectives of European critics to those of their American counterparts.

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The unprecedented attention of the American media to the Bayreuth Festival, and the immediacy with which its proceedings were conveyed to readers in the U.S. was a major coup for American journalism, with significant cultural and social implications. It allowed Americans unable to attend the event to feel like they were intimately connected to its happenings. More importantly, it indicated that Americans were no longer just passive receivers of cultural news reported by European journalists, reprinted from English papers or translated from foreign-language sources. They were now active participants in events of international distinction like the Bayreuth Festival, and had their own critics to provide up-to-date accounts from an American perspective. Furthermore, the published commentaries of American foreign correspondents exhibited a new level of sophistication; as an editor of the *New York Times* pointed out, “We call them *articles* rather than letters, for they were not mere reports but criticisms, very much such criticisms…”

But perhaps most significantly, the American journalists, as a group, were largely “pro-Wagner”. This not only set them apart from some of their European colleagues, but also distinctively shaped the purpose of their discourse and ultimately, Americans’ perceptions, and future expectations, about the *Ring*. Thus, before examining their reviews in detail, a brief overview about these critics who were sent to Bayreuth and the U.S. newspapers with which they were affiliated, will provide us with an idea of the contexts from which their opinions were derived and the scope of their influence.

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At the time of the Festival, the *New York Tribune*, founded in 1841, was considered to be one of the most widely read American newspapers, with a combined circulation of its daily, weekly, and semi-weekly editions at more than 300,000. During the 1840s and 50s, the Wagner skeptic William Fry held the position of music critic, but in 1866, he was replaced by John Rose Green Hassard (1836–1888), who would remain with the paper until 1883. American-born, Hassard was one of the critical van-guard who defended Wagner’s music in the late-1860s and 1870s, and his assessments of the 1876 Festival were generally very positive. Indeed, Dwight labeled him a “thoroughly committed Wagnerite”, but despite not sharing Hassard’s high opinion of the composer and his operas, it was the *Tribune* critic’s reviews he reprinted most completely in his *Journal of Music*. While this might have been because they were more readily accessible than those of the other journalists, Hassard did have a strong reputation. His musical criticisms were known, and often praised, for their scholarly attention to detail and their honesty, as well as his writing style of “great clearness, simplicity, and force.”

His lengthy articles about the 1876 performances of the *Ring* cycle were deemed significant enough to be published as a separate volume. As one reviewer of the book commented,

> It was not Mr. Hassard’s purpose, from the nature of his task, to write to the newspaper in which his well-known musical criticism has given ample evidence of his ability, a purely technical account of Wagner’s masterpiece; but he has succeed in doing a more widely useful thing, --in putting upon record in the most vivid way the impression made by it upon one whose knowledge made him a competent observer, while his experience made him a thorough interpreter of what his readers wished to know.

Although his life ended before he could see an American production of the *Ring*, Hassard’s work

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60 Little biographical information on Hassard exists; the best source currently available is his obituary printed in the *New York Times*, 19 Apr 1888, 8. Hassard’s reviews for the *Tribune* were later published in a short book, entitled *The Ring of the Nibelungs: A Description of its First Performance in August 1876* (New York: F. Hart, 1877).


paved the way for Henry Krehbiel (1854–1923), who became the Tribune’s staunch advocate for Wagner’s operas during their early U.S. performance history in the 1880s and 90s.

The New York Herald was the Tribune’s greatest rival. One of the oldest of the major dailies, it was founded in 1835 by James Gordon Bennett (1795–1872), and saw itself as the “most widely read newspaper in the world.” By the 1870s, it had a relatively large circulation of over 90,000 copies. Its popularity was due in part to an attractive balance of reportage on the most sensational news stories, coupled with a successful formula of dynamic writing, as well as extensive coverage of foreign news and business matters, more so than any other newspaper.\(^6\)

The 1876 Bayreuth Festival was evidently worthy of the Herald’s attention and it dispatched its music critic and foreign writer, John P. Jackson (?-1897) to cover it. A strong supporter of Wagner’s music, Jackson was keen to help build a broad audience for the Ring cycle when it would be staged later, in the United States.\(^6\) His reviews of the work’s premiere stood out among the other newspapers as they were accompanied by excerpts from the musical scores of each of the cycle’s operas (see Figure 2.4). For each article, these illustrations nearly filled the entire front page of the paper, and every selection was briefly described. They are a striking example of the printing innovations at the Herald that enabled the paper to be the first to incorporate pictures within its content. Even now, it is hard to imagine any twenty-first-century newspaper devoting so much space to musical notation.

The reach of the Times during this period was considerably less than the Tribune’s and the Herald’s as it was the newest of the major New York dailies, but its reputation rose quickly due to the “careful and conscientious reporting” of its journalists.\(^6\) Frederick A. Schwab (1844–1927), who covered the 1876 Bayreuth Festival for the Times, was the paper’s drama and music critic. According to his obituary, Schwab was regarded as an “authority of music and the

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\(^6\) This attitude is conveyed in his article “The Ring of the Nibelung,” in The Cosmopolitan 6, no. 5 (March 1889): 415–33.
Figure 2.4. Music from *Siegfried* Printed in the *New York Herald*. 
theatre” as well as a “man of great wit and charm” who wrote “entertaining” musical criticisms.\textsuperscript{67} Although he was of German/Austrian descent, he had learned to speak and write French fluently, and had an affinity for French culture. An original member of the Lotos Club, a social organization for journalists, critics, and writers, he had formally welcomed Jacques Offenbach to the United States. Schwab also made frequent visits to Paris (he would move there permanently in 1890), including a stop en-route to the Bayreuth Festival. Consequently, his reviews of the \textit{Ring}'s premiere display his awareness of the strong pro- and anti-Wagner biases toward the composer and his music as printed in the daily press of that city. This understanding might have led Schwab to give more moderate assessments of the performances; while he generally reviewed them quite positively, he tended to be more forthright in his criticisms than Jackson or Hassard. Excerpts from Schwab’s articles were also reprinted in \textit{Dwight’s Journal of Music}, though not as extensively as those of his counterpart at the \textit{Tribune}.\textsuperscript{68}

Even though the New York \textit{Sun} and the \textit{New Yorker Staats-Zeitung} did not have dedicated professional music critics, they were nonetheless considered serious newspapers, similar in age and reputations as the \textit{Herald} and the \textit{Tribune}.\textsuperscript{69} The \textit{Staats-Zeitung} was the most significant of the German-language dailies of which there were many. In the 1870s, its circulation reached around 50,000, and it claimed to be the largest German-language newspaper in the entire world, and the sixth largest daily in the United States. Its readership was primarily the substantial German-American immigrant population of New York. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that German-American broadsheets were essentially American papers in the German-language, in that their content was primarily about issues pertaining to American life and politics. As James Berquist has observed, in general, “the typical German newspaper offered far more news and discussion of general events of American life

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{New York Times}, 11 Jun 1927, 19. See also Rothman’s examination of Schwab’s career as a critic for the \textit{Times}, in \textit{The Origin and Development of Dramatic Criticism}.

\textsuperscript{68} See note 59.

\textsuperscript{69} The \textit{Sun} began publication in 1833; the \textit{Staats-Zeitung} in 1834.
than of European matters.” The German-American population, being bilingual, usually read both German-language and English-language papers, so it probably did not seem unusual that both the German Staats-Zeitung and the English Sun engaged well-known German-Americans, like Neuendorff and Damrosch, to report on the Festival. Moreover, while these conductors were strong supporters of Wagner’s Bayreuth enterprise, and prominent advocates of his music in the U.S., it is notable that they did not share the pro-German sentiments expressed by the composer, nor did they find this particular aspect to be directly relevant to Americans and their appreciation of his works.

Outside of New York, some of the more comprehensive reviews on the Ring cycle’s premiere came from Boston and Chicago. For the Daily Advertiser, Boston’s oldest newspaper, Sylvester Baxter (1850–1927) contributed detailed discussions of the performances. Baxter was American-born but his visit to the Bayreuth Festival as the paper’s German correspondent occurred during his academic studies in Leipzig and Berlin between 1875 and 1877. While abroad, he had attained fluency in the language and fostered a growing interest in German affairs and culture, which likely prompted his endeavor to report on the event. Chicago readers of the Daily Tribune, the city’s oldest and most influential daily, were kept up-to-date of the Festival’s proceedings mostly via short summary reports, which were dispatched via telegraph. The paper also publish two in-depth reviews about the performances of Das Rheingold and Die Walküre on September 17 and October 1, respectively, though it seems

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71 In 1876, the Daily Advertiser was in its sixty-third year of publication; it was founded in 1813 by Nathan Hale.
72 Biographical information on Baxter is scant but some details can be obtained from http://www.library.cornell.edu/Reps/DOCS/baxter.htm and http://www.mass.gov/dcr/uphistory.htm. Baxter was particularly interest in German urban planning, of which his knowledge later helped influence American city planners at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Sylvester Baxter, “The German Way of Making Better Cities,” in Atlantic Monthly 104 (July 1909); 72–95.
73 See Chicago Daily Tribune, 14 Aug 1876, 5; 15 Aug 1876, 5; 17 Aug 1876, 5; 18 Aug 1876, 5; 20 Aug 1876, 2.

none were written for *Siegfried* or *Götterdämmerung*. These articles were signed by “W.”, whose identity remains unknown. It appears he was most likely a guest correspondent for the paper, perhaps based in Germany.

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With this general understanding of the major American papers and their respective critics who were present at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival, we will now consider what aspects of the *Ring* cycle’s premiere interested the journalists, and what they wished to convey to their readers back home in the U.S. In general, the correspondents were primarily concerned with providing detailed accounts of the performances. Yet, they also reflected on the larger implications of the event, that is, the extent to which the *Ring* itself and its presentation fulfilled Wagner’s theoretical and artistic intentions, and whether or not the cycle might succeed beyond the Festival’s unique setting. In most cases, their lengthy reports demonstrate a close engagement with the entire work and its realization on stage. Although their assessments on the particulars of the performances were not always in agreement, taken together, their articles reflect an overarching positive agenda to promote Wagner’s music to Americans. This rather unified attitude, compared to the more polarized reactions of the European (i.e. German, French, Italian, and English) media, appeared to be unique to the American press.

**Impressions of Bayreuth, the Festspielhaus, and the Dress Rehearsals**

The American critics saw their first duty was to describe the unique context of the Festival to their readers. Nearly all of them arrived in Bayreuth well in advance of the start of the first cycle and attended the public dress rehearsals. A considerable amount of column space was devoted to descriptions of the town itself. Many remarked on Bayreuth’s ideal location of

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74 The *Daily Tribune* reprinted on 20 August 1876 (p. 9) Schwab’s first review of *Götterdämmerung* for the *New York Times*.

75 His name was not recorded on the *Fremdenlisten*. “W.” was not George P. Upton (1834–1919), the *Tribune*’s chief music critic from 1860 to 1885, nor William Smythe Babcock Matthews (1837–1912), the editor of Chicago-based publications like *Music* and *Song Messenger of the Northwest*, since neither left any record of having attended the 1876 Bayreuth Festival.
being situated in the middle of Germany; one of them likened it to a “retired, sleepy country village, but beautiful and grand in its surroundings”, accessible from the larger cities but “free from the[ir] din, confusion, and turmoil.” Schwab of the New York Times commented how the relative isolation of the town, which he himself experienced, having traveled fifteen hours from the town of Lindau, was suited to the “solemnity” and the singular purpose of the event. Framing the Festival’s location in more religious overtones, the Advertiser’s Sylvester Baxter described the town as a “musical Mecca” to which music-lovers will make a “pilgrimage” for the experience of “near-perfect” performances.⁷⁶ Indeed, Bayreuth was heavy with Wagner-worship, even down to the souvenir objects being sold in the shops. As Schwab observed with amusement:

The windows of the print shops are filled with views of the theatre and the composer’s villa, with new editions of his prose and poetical works, and with commentaries upon his achievements by enthusiastic admirers. The dealers in fancy wares have immense assortments of busts of Wagner, Wagner souvenirs, in shape of portemonnaies, cigar cases, pipes with heads carved in the image of the creator of the trilogy, and Wagner canes. A hatter exhibits a new and hideous travelling cap called a “Nibelungen Mütze,” and a clothier has small cravats which instead of ends have at one extremity a ready-made bow, in the centre of which is a square-cut photograph of the hero of the hour.⁷⁷

The rarified atmosphere of the Festival, however, could not entirely compensate for some of the more practical problems that arose. For one, the town of Bayreuth strained to accommodate the large influx of visitors. Schwab was among the few critics to mention some of the inconveniences he encountered during his stay, including the high prices of lodging and the lack of sufficient restaurant and dining options. According to Tchaikovsky’s account, the main topic of conversation during the intermissions was about the dearth of food rather than Wagner’s music. These problems were further exacerbated by the very hot weather during the weeks of the Festival. The Festspielhaus’s position atop a hill, although impressive, caused much discomfort to the many attendees who had to make a twenty-five minute trek in the hot sun, sharing the dusty roads with the lucky few who were brought up in carriages.

As American periodicals generally lacked images of the *Festspielhaus* in the years leading up to the Festival, every critic provided an extensive description of the exterior and interior of the theatre. (Only the *New York Herald* provided an actual diagram, a bird’s-eye view of the auditorium.)\(^78\) Like many of the European journalists, they remarked on the simplicity of the building’s design, the uninterrupted view of the stage, the sunken orchestra pit, and the darkened auditorium, all in service of Wagner’s wish to focus the spectator’s attention on the stage. The composer’s removal of the galleries and boxes, intended to eliminate the hierarchical positioning of different social classes typically found in the layout of court theatres, was found by Hassard and Jackson to be especially remarkable. In their view, Wagner appeared to be eschewing profit for the sake of his art, unlike at American theatres, where opera companies relied heavily on those particular sections for revenue. As Hassard compared,

> It is evident...that no money-making theater could be well constructed on this principle, because none of them could ignore the profits which come from the three or four tiers of galleries. Usually theaters are built for the sake of the ticket office. Wagner has been happy in being able to dispense with this altogether, and so has built one which answers perfectly to the requirements of his theory of the operas.\(^79\)

Similarly, the *Herald* critic thought this arrangement of the seats showed that Wagner was more concerned with “the interests of the audience...than the desire to make the place profitable to the committee.” He went on to recommend that future theatre builders and managers would do well to study the *Festspielhaus* as a model. Schwab too found Wagner’s theatre to be unparalleled in design and function but—as he and others soon discovered while sitting for the dress rehearsals—not entirely without flaw. The auditorium’s lack of proper ventilation, together with the summer heat, made the performances an uncomfortably oppressive experience for many in the audience.

\(^{78}\) One rare exception was an early engraving of the *Festspielhaus’s* exterior, then unfinished, that appeared in the American periodical, *Appleton’s Journal*, on December 6, 1873. The diagram of the auditorium was printed in the *New York Herald*, 13 Aug 1876, 3.

\(^{79}\) *New York Tribune*, 12 Aug 1876, 3. According to Hassard, who implied that he had had a direct conversation with Wagner himself, the composer was “particular in emphasizing the fact that the plan had no speculative or money-making character whatsoever; it is an effort, he said, purely in the interest of musical art.”
The dress rehearsals began on Sunday, August 6, and initially, were not intended to be open to the public. (Of the American critics, Damrosch appeared to be the only one to gain access to the preceding rehearsals of Die Walküre on July 31, Siegfried on August 2, and Götterdämmerung on August 3, presumably because of his friendship with the composer.) Wagner especially, did not want critics present, but for the dress rehearsal of Walküre, Ludwig II, who was in attendance, ordered the house to be opened so that the acoustics of the theatre could be properly tested with a full auditorium. The distribution of free tickets to the rehearsal drew a large audience of between 1,300 and 1,400, but the scheme was soon readjusted to $5 per seat for the dress rehearsals of Siegfried and Götterdämmerung, to prevent undue “scalping”. Hassard and Schwab stated in their articles that they attended these rehearsals, but expressly declined to elaborate on what they saw until the first proper performance of the cycle. As they waited, they provided their readers with detailed plot synopses for each of the Ring’s dramas in order to make accessible the cycle’s grand myth in the absence of an English translation (to do this, all the critics must have had sufficient knowledge of German). They also supplied extended discussions on the genesis of the cycle’s text and music, so to prepare their faraway readers for their forthcoming reviews. Other journalists who did venture predictions hoped for a successful outcome but declared that even if the endeavor should fail, they remained positive that the composer would still be hailed as a genius for his audacity and determination in undertaking such a vast endeavor. As the Chicago Tribune critic pondered,

Never before has opera been given under such advantages. Never before has a composer been invested with such absolute power….He may fail, but even in his failure men will admire him as a second Prometheus, punished by the gods for seeking to steal the sacred fire and bring it to mortals.

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80 As Fricke recorded in this diary, “Yesterday the free admission to Siegfried was canceled. The rush to get tickets had caused too great a confusion in Bayreuth, and now they are getting as much as twenty marks for a ticket. Gross misconduct was made with the free tickets, they were “scalped” at high prices.” In Wagner in Rehearsal, 1875–76: The Diaries of Richard Fricke, trans. by George R. Fricke, ed. James Deaville with Evan Baker (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1998), 93.


82 The first English translation of the Ring’s text was not published until 1877, by Alfred Forman (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne).

83 Chicago Daily Tribune, 15 Aug 1876, 4.
American Press Responses to the Premiere of Der Ring des Nibelungen

The American critics confined their reviews to the first presentation of the cycle, which began with Das Rheingold on August 13, after which Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung followed on August 14, 16 and 17, respectively. (The premiere of Siegfried was originally scheduled for August 15 but Franz Betz, who portrayed Wotan, needed a day to recuperate from a bout of hoarseness.) A second cycle was given from August 20 to 23, and the final series from August 27 to 30. Some of the journalists may have stayed to see these other performances, though they did not mention it nor did they write additional reviews.  

In general, the correspondents aimed to convey sufficient musical and visual details of the Ring in their reports as the performances unfolded, recognizing that most Americans had very limited experience with the Ring's music and even less of an idea of its unusual staging. Since none of the papers printed pictures or illustrations, readers had to rely solely on these narratives to imagine how they might have progressed. In this vein, it is worth bearing in mind the challenges faced by the critics in reviewing the complete Ring as performed on stage for the first time, having only heard select excerpts in concerts. Presumably, they had prepared by consulting the text and musical scores of the Ring, as is frequently demonstrated by their often-detailed and sometimes sophisticated analyses of the stage action and the music of the cycle.  

Not surprisingly though, many of their reviews only scratch the surface. The critics' sense of being overwhelmed was also apparent. Many shared their struggle in translating their experience adequately into words, warning readers that their assessments were based only on a single hearing. Others felt the need to mention their limitations due to impending newspaper deadlines. As the critic of the Chicago Daily Tribune described the conditions that many a journalist confronted at the Festival:

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84 Schwab clearly indicated that he did not remain in Bayreuth, stating that “after recording the incidents of this affair, I shall leave for Munich.” New York Times, 3 Sep 1876, 7.

85 Schwab mentioned that the orchestral scores had only been issued very recently and that he had made a “hasty perusal” of them prior to his arrival in Bayreuth, noting that “they contain some passages of wondrous illustrativeness, impressiveness, and beauty.” See New York Times, 13 Aug 1876, 1.
Surely the occasion of its first presentation to us, through theatrical performance, merits a somewhat more deliberate notice than that which, in the interval between the conclusion of the opera and the hour of going to press, is written for the daily paper. Especially is this true, since the novelty of this art finds us with no established canons of criticism ready at hand; and I feel that any criticism upon the “Ring”...after a single hearing could be nothing less, if conscientiously done, than an expression of the writer’s bewilderment. 

To be sure, the daunting experience facing critics was also felt by the rest of the audience. This sensation was further intensified by Wagner’s attempts to alter some of the customary social habits of opera-goers to insure that the “complete illusion” created during the cycle’s presentation was not disrupted. Two modifications in particular were most commonly cited by the American correspondents: the suppression of applause until the very end of each performance, and the dimmed lighting of the auditorium. The former was not always successful as reports indicated that spontaneous outbursts of clapping occurred often, despite Wagner’s issuance, as Schwab pointed out, of “printed requests, which were liberally distributed about the house.” Regarding the latter, it was already understood that Wagner would have the newly-installed gas lights of the auditorium dimmed in order to focus the attention of the spectators to the “vision of a dream” occurring on stage. On opening night, however, the theater was accidentally plunged into total darkness due to a problem with the mechanism to adjust the lights. Although the issue was solved for subsequent performances, the journalists noted that it was nevertheless so dim as to make it impossible for anyone to follow the libretto during the performances. As Jackson of the Herald explained, the audience was thus compelled to learn the Ring’s text prior to the performances, a formidable task for most, if not all, attendees.

Even with the challenges posed by these then-novel practices, the American critics described to their readers that the overall reaction to the Ring cycle’s premiere was overwhelmingly positive. Damrosch noted that the audience’s response increased with each successive evening as they grew more accustomed to what was being presented and the

86 Chicago Daily Tribune, 17 Sep 1876, 12.
87 New York Times, 14 Aug 1876, 1.
surrounding circumstances. According to the Bostonian Baxter, it was the festival conditions created by Wagner that facilitated the successful transformation of “pilgrims” into true “devotees”. As he wrote, “The success of such a work, which occupies for three successive days more than a quarter of the twenty-four hours […] and demands the attention of the spectator through two and one-quarter hours without a pause, would, under ordinary theatrical conditions, be impossible.” Of these “devotees”, Baxter praised the Americans above all other Festival attendees, for he interpreted their willingness to embark on the long and expensive “pilgrimage” to Bayreuth as direct proof of their genuine interest in Wagner’s Ring. As he commented, “[C]ontrary to expectation, there are hardly any Americans who have come out of idle curiosity…Almost all are attracted hither by a deep, earnest interest in the work. The majority have crossed over the ocean especially on this account, and are going back as soon as the festival is over.”

Wagner’s Nibelungen Myth

The American critics did not undertake extensive analyses of Wagner’s text to the Ring cycle but their reviews suggest that they had studied the libretto in advance of the performances (or had sufficient fluency with the German language) to be able comment on its subject matter. Baxter and Jackson thought it showed evidence of Wagner’s literary ingenuity. Baxter was particularly drawn to how the composer adapted the original Scandinavian and Germanic mythological sources for his cycle. Based on his acquaintance with these earlier materials, he deemed Wagner to be especially masterful in his efforts, writing that “he shows thorough scholarship and a great knowledge of northern mythology and, for a work so thoroughly objective in style as this appears to be, he for the most part has kept remarkably true to the mythological spirit.” In Baxter’s view, the characters of Brünnhilde, Siegfried, Mime, and Alberich best embody this mythical essence. On the other hand, Baxter found the gods were not

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88 Boston Daily Advertiser, 4 Sep 1876, col. B.
“elevated” enough. For this he faulted Wagner for giving them dialogue that was “too realistic” and “commonplace, and the occasional use of idioms and phrases which savor more of the daily life of ordinary modern mortals.”89 His main criticism was reserved for the composer’s formulation of the goddess Fricka, whom he thought was characterized as too much of a “feminine scold” of the mortal variety, with Wotan as her “hen-pecked husband.” Schwab, however, felt the opposite, citing that “the passions of mankind and the human attributes of the gods” were far more compelling than the other-worldly doings of purely mythical characters. With the exception of these minor differences in opinion, the American critics, in general, found little that was objectionable about Wagner’s libretti for his operatic cycle.

Curiously, there were almost no attempts by the U.S. press to interpret the meaning of the cycle’s conclusion. It appears though, that the essential meaning of what is known as the “Feuerbach” ending seemed to have taken precedence in the critics’ minds; that is, the destruction of a world ruled by greed and power gives way to a new order governed by free, unconditional love. This was how Jackson explained it to the Herald’s readers:

It is a curious idea that runs through all Scandinavian mythology that the grasping after gold first brought discord and misfortune into the world. But from the ruins of the ancient divine edifice which falls from the curse Wagner allows a newer, grander era to follow, which will rest on the virtual foundation of love. This is Brünnhilde’s legacy to the world as she mounts the pyre with Siegfried’s corpse.90

In Schwab’s plot synopsis of the Ring for the Times, he, in fact, erroneously quoted Brünnhilde’s closing words as coming from the “Feuerbach” version.91 It seems then, that this particular text must have already been in circulation among Americans, even though Wagner did not include

89 Ibid.
90 New York Herald, 17 Aug 1876, 2–3.
91 The “Feuerbach” ending, conceived in 1852, was Wagner’s first recast of the original 1848 conclusion to his Ring poem. Schwab quoted this part of Brünnhilde’s peroration (his translation): “If the race of gods fades away like a breath, if I leave the world without a ruler, I bequeath to ye the most sacred of treasures, my knowledge. Neither land, nor gold, nor godlike splendor, nor lordly state, nor the deceptive bond of wretched treaties, nor the harsh law of hypocritical manners bestow happiness. Bliss in joy and sorrow comes to us from love alone.” New York Times, 13 Aug 1876, 1. When Wagner finally set the end of Götterdämmerung to music in 1874, he used the 1852 version of the text but omitted the “Feuerbachian” lines. See Appendix of Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion, ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 362–63. For a detailed examination of Wagner’s creative process in composing the ending to the Ring, see Feng-Shu Lee’s “Ending the Ring” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2011).
these verses in the final rendering. On the other hand, there was no acknowledgement by the American correspondents of Wagner’s second textual revision which assumes a Schopenhauerian slant. These words—which were supposed to replace the Feuerbach insertion—were never set to music either, though their meaning was closer to what the composer intended to express musically at the conclusion of his cycle.92

_The Music of the Ring_

American critics at the _Ring_ cycle’s premiere faced a significant challenge in having to describe and evaluate the music of an entire cycle of works to which they and their readers had little concrete experience. To be sure, many would have expected the operas to exhibit, and exemplify, the features that they already knew defined the Wagnerian operatic language: the “continuous melody” of the vocal parts, the elevated role of the orchestra in the drama, unusual harmonies and novel textures and timbres. Still, up until 1876, Americans’ understanding of these aspects was based primarily on their encounters with _Tannhäuser_ and _Lohengrin_, the only works to be staged in the U.S. so far. Knowledge of his later style, as exhibited in _Tristan und Isolde, Die Meistersinger_, and _Die Walküre_, was then limited to only a few orchestral excerpts or the playing of piano arrangements and transcriptions. The Bayreuth correspondents thus had to bear these issues in mind when writing about the cycle’s premiere.

For the American newspapers, the critics appear to have adopted a common strategy to convey how the _Ring_’s music unfolded. Nearly all of them sought to communicate in rich detail the plot action in tandem with the musical “highlights.” The larger aim of their descriptive method was primarily educative. Driven by their largely pro-Wagner perspectives, the American journalists used their reviews of the cycle’s music as a platform to build prospective audiences for Wagner opera in the U.S. While they did not always like what they heard, they usually

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faulted their own limited understanding or problems in the performances themselves, rather than the composer. Notably, they regarded the anti-Wagner position as defined by willful ignorance, and purported it could be corrected by a progressive mind-set and through concerted study.

Such was the view of Jackson, the *Herald*’s correspondent:

> I say this in full knowledge...that thousands of persons delight to style themselves anti-Wagnerites from pure ignorance, and other thousands because they do not like his music or his operas, not understanding them. But I do not see any reason why these critics should have their own say all the time, for there are many thousands of persons who have the intellectual capacity to become enamored with these wondrous musical and dramatic creations.⁹³

In their assessments, certain parts of the operas were unanimously found to be compelling, musically and dramatically. These parts include: from *Die Walküre*, the tuneful love song of Siegmund near the end of Act I, the “Ride of the Valkyries”, as well as Wotan’s farewell to Brünnhilde and the ensuing “Magic Fire” music in Act III; from *Siegfried*, the two forging songs from the first Act, the Act II scene with Siegfried alone in the forest with the Woodbird, and the extended love duet of Brünnhilde and Siegfried in the final Act; and from *Götterdämmerung*, the music accompanying the hero’s journey on the Rhine in Act I, Siegfried’s funeral march, and Brünnhilde’s immolation bringing the end of the gods and the return of the ring to the Rhinemaidens. To be sure, it was perhaps quite natural their attentions were drawn to these portions of the cycle as Wagner had already selected and arranged them for concert performances through which, as we already know, many Europeans and Americans became acquainted with them. The Bayreuth presentation, however, gave them the first opportunity to experience them afresh in the musical and visual context of the entire work.

In this respect, the selections most familiar to Americans, all from *Die Walküre*, evoked enthusiastic reactions from the critics. Many of them reveled in Siegmund’s love song, noting that the emotional impact of its passionate music could only be completely felt after one had “lived through” the preceding gloom of Sieglinde’s plight. They emphasized to their readers that

the full effect of the drama and the music of this and the other excerpts could only be
experienced in their staging, not in their concert versions. On the “Ride of the Valkyries”,
Hassard commented, “This is the true Walkyrenritt, not the piece as you have heard it in the
concert room. For such portions of the opera stage representation is indispensable; and
‘Wotan’s farewell’ has an entirely different significance, on the stage, from the piece as heard in
concert.” Schwab too, was quite astonished by the “Ride”, which he now heard sung for the first
time. To him, it sounded strikingly different from the solely instrumental versions he heard at
New York concerts. “[T]he effect of [the Ride]”, he observed, “is very much augmented by the
weird chorus of the Walkyries, with well-contrived surroundings…the vocal parts are much more
weird when sung than when allotted to instruments.” Perhaps the voices heightened his
perception of “weirdness”, which, in part, was probably also due to Wagner’s emphasis here on
dissonant augmented triads, as for example, outlined in the Valkyrie cry, “Hojotoho!” Schwab
was also captivated by the combined impression of the visual effects and the music in the
ending of Die Walküre, noting especially the flickering, chromatic music of Loge, which made
“remarkably realistic…the play of the flames about the rock where the slumbering Walkyrie
recline[d].”

Other parts of the cycle were praised by the American critics for being fine examples of
some of Wagner’s theoretical intentions, such as his integration of the poetical and musical
elements. Baxter, Schwab, and Hassard all felt the composer had found his optimal form of
“melody”, particularly in the love duet between Brünnhilde and Siegfried at the end of Siegfried.
Wagner’s talents in creating dramatic pictures by means of the orchestral music alone were
similarly admired in the “Forest scene” as well as Siegfried’s journey on the Rhine and the
hero’s funeral march. (Incidentally, these selections would become, over the following decades,
among the most popular and often-performed excerpts from the Ring in the U.S.)
Remarkably, the American correspondents found relatively little to criticize about the music of
the cycle. Only Schwab appeared to have raised the most objections about the sections that
contained heavy dialogue, such as between Wotan and Fricka in Act II of Die Walküre, and in Act I of Siegfried, the scene with Siegfried and Mime, and the question-and-answer game between the Wanderer and Mime. All these sections he described as “heavy and musically purposeless”, “exceedingly tedious” or “very tiresome.” His limited understanding of the German text though did not appear to be the basis for his judgment, as Neuendorff too felt ambivalent about the vocal parts here, and found they lacked beauty and interest.

Aside from these judgments, the American critics seemed much more concerned with distinguishing themselves from the “anti-Wagnerites” who complained about the absence of melody, by conscientiously defining the vocal line as “continuous melody” or “continuous recitative.” The Advertiser’s Baxter noted that when interpreted in this manner, one could find plenty of melodic moments in the Ring, even parts that resemble “songs.” But Jackson of the Herald went further, encouraging his readers to leave behind their fondness for the aria of Italian opera, and embrace Wagner’s more organic (and in his view, more superior) conception as exhibited in the cycle. The former he criticized as being akin to “the ballads of the street and the airs of the black and white minstrels” and thus, contained “no art.” The Wagnerian type, on the other hand, he elevates as “true art”, in that “boys cannot whistle his music in the streets as if his work were the art of Auber or Offenbach…[it] is never within common reach.” Clearly, these comments were intended to be provocative; such racial and class-inflected discourse is an early example of how some American writers began to frame the intellectual appreciation of Wagner’s music vis-à-vis Italian and French opera as a method of social distinction, especially among the ascendant middle-class.

The American critics were also keen to accept Hans von Wolzogen’s concept of “leitmotivs”, whose advent at the time of the 1876 Festival was formative in the later cultivation of Wagner connoisseurship in European, as well as American musical culture. Published four weeks before the performances, Wolzogen’s thematic guide, entitled Thematischer Leitfaden

durch die Musik zu Richard Wagners Festspiel “Der Ring des Nibelungen”, was available to Festival attendees. As evident from their reviews, the journalists utilized the method to help their readers better comprehend the musical content of the cycle. Although this approach is commonplace today, this was then a new mode of discourse about Wagner’s operas that the correspondents immediately adopted, even though the composer himself was quite ambivalent about the method. Most likely, they were themselves attracted to the convenience and accessibility of Wolzogen’s analysis. Although none had explicitly cited their use of the guide in their reviews, a few of the critics had evidently consulted the handbook which identifies ninety different motives, a number which both Schwab and Baxter quoted in their articles.

All the American journalists praised Wagner for his masterful handling of the “leading motives” in the Ring. As Hassard explained in glowing terms for the New York Tribune:

Every thought, I may say every word, came to have its appropriate musical phrase; every prominent idea in the drama was distinguished by its own succession of musical sounds, called the “leading motive,” generally heard in the orchestra, and repeated frequently as the idea recurred; and those motives and phrases were continually elaborated and combined in the most beautiful and ingenious ways.

Some of the critics in their commentaries also attempted to trace the evolution of certain motives and their psychological and emotional meanings associated with the characters as the drama of the cycle unfolded. The Advertiser’s Baxter, for example, offered this particularly astute analysis of a pivotal moment in the first act of Götterdämmerung:

Very effective is the situation in the first act, where Gutrune offers the betrayal drink to Siegfried, who, ever thinking of Brünnhilde, turns to drink to her, her beautiful love-motive sounding as he takes the first draught, but growing fainter and fainter in the mysterious harmony of the forgetfulness spell, which gradually grows into the graceful

95 Or Thematic guide through the music to Richard Wagner’s festival drama The Ring of the Nibelung. It was published in Leipzig, July 1876; an English translation followed in 1882 and 1888. The guide was later retitled Führer durch die Musik zu Richard Wagners Festspiel Der Ring des Nibelungen and Der Ring des Nibelungen: ein thematischer Leitfaden durch Dichtung und Musik. Wolzogen (1848–1938), a pro-Wagner writer, first coined the term “Leitmotif” in his analytical essay “Die Motive in Wagner’s Götterdämmerung”.

96 Wolzogen’s motivic analysis was not the first one of its type: see note 40. For a comparison of Federlein’s and Wolzogen’s analyses, see Christian Thorau’s landmark study, Semantisierte Sinnlichkeit: Studien zu Rezeption und Zeichenstruktur der Leitmotivtechnik Richard Wagners (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003); also Peter Rümenapp’s “Hans von Wolzogen und Gottlieb Federlein: zwei Leimotivexegeten des “Ring des Nibelungen,” in Acta Musicologica 69:2 (Jul–Dec 1997), 120–133.


98 See 14 Sep 1876, col. D.
Gutrune motive. Brünnhilde has vanished from Siegfried’s memory, and the hero is inflamed with a sudden passion for the fair maid before him.

Such instances were cited by the American journalists to prove their larger claim that Wagner was equal to the genius of Beethoven in the technique of motivic development. As Hassard summarized, “In a word, Wagner turned into opera the full rich stream of the music of Beethoven.”

Critics also began to endorse that knowledge of the Ring’s motives was the key to understanding the cycle. To this extent, they grasped Wagner’s conception of musical motives (as he had outlined in Oper und Drama) as “melodic moments of feeling”, which, in their use and development, guide the listener/spectator through the “inner meaning” of the drama. Neuendorff told readers of the Staats-Zeitung that the orchestral part enables the audience to commit the entire drama to memory, and thus, whoever is committed to memorizing the motives has a clear guide to comprehending it.99 “W.” of the Chicago Tribune specifically described how the presentation, development, and recurrence of these motives help to structure one’s listening of the Ring dramas:

By associating in a simple manner, easy to comprehend, certain incidents with certain musical expressions of emotion, it gave it a definiteness to our emotional associations, so that on hearing in the later dramas one of the motives with which we had become familiar in “Rheingold” recalled by the orchestra, the effect should be at once produced of bringing back our minds the entire scene connected with that motive. The action before us would thus be contrasted with the past events, and manifestly the dramatic intensity of many situations would be vastly heightened.100

Familiarity with the motives, in turn, would make the experience of the cycle’s performance more enjoyable. As Baxter sought to convince, “[W]ith a knowledge of the meaning of the elementary leading motives the whole meaning and the intention of the work in its progress and development dawn[s] upon one like…the sudden unfolding of a rich and beautiful language hitherto unknown.”101 Although specific motives were not notated and printed with any of the

99 New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 29 Aug 1876, 1.
100 Chicago Daily Tribune, 1 Oct 1876, 12.
101 Boston Daily Advertiser, 14 Sep 1876, col. D.
reviews, the New York *Herald’s* full-page illustrations of reduced score excerpts from each opera did afford their readers glimpses of key musical moments from the *Ring*. One could imagine that interested Americans might have been excited to take these pages to their parlor pianos and play these tunes for themselves.

Ultimately, the discourse of “leading motives” first employed by American critics to review the 1876 Bayreuth Festival persisted in the following decades, as the *Ring* operas began to be performed in the U.S. As Christian Thorau has argued, reception knowledge of the cycle through the study of motivic guidebooks became a characteristic part of the self-improvement and educational practices that defined the emerging middle-classes in Europe during the late nineteenth century. This too was the case in American cities, where music journalists, conductors, and women’s societies, in particular, were the driving forces of this development. Notably, understanding the *Ring* through its motives was especially reinforced in printed criticism and other modes of presentation, such as the popular lecture-recitals of Walter Damrosch.

*The Singers and the Orchestra*

Concerning the performances by the singers and the orchestra, the American critics had high expectations. They already knew Wagner had individually selected his singers for the roles of the *Ring* and assembled the very large orchestra of 116 musicians from the best players of several German cities. The journalists also knew of the special and unprecedented conditions under which the musicians rehearsed during the summers of 1875 and 1876 in preparation for the performances. They were aware as well of what the composer demanded from his singers: the ability to project the text clearly, and to completely immerse themselves in their roles, acting in a seemingly spontaneous and “natural” manner. These Wagner reforms appeared to be

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absorbed by the critics without question; consequently, it was these principles against which they evaluated the quality of what they saw and heard.

Of all the vocalists, Amalie Materna in the role of Brünnhilde garnered the greatest praise from the American critics. The Boston Advertiser’s Baxter thought her faultless on all accounts, praising her voice as “truly heroic in quality, of glorious volume and great range” and her “marvelous” ability to portray the development in her character. He hoped that she would soon reprise her role sometime in the United States, writing “I hear on good authority that she would look favorably on proposals for an American tour, and I hope some manager will have the enterprise to engage her for a season of good German opera.” She would ultimately do so in 1885, for the early performances of Die Walküre at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House.

Among the other singers who were deemed exceptional in their respective parts were Heinrich Vogl as the slippery demi-god Loge, Karl Hill as the bitter Alberich, and Karl Schlosser as the treacherous, manipulative Mime. If they did not always sing in tune, their excellent acting abilities appeared to have more than made up for it; as Hassard noted in the Tribune:

Male singers in Germany as a general thing sing more or less false, and Herr Wagner’s company of gods and heroes offer no exception to the nearly universal rule. But we are ready to pardon occasional lapses of this sort in consideration of the remarkable excellence of their personations, their noble appearance, good voice, and close sympathy with the music.

Wagner’s casting, however, of Albert Niemann and Georg Unger as Siegmund and Siegfried, respectively, was more controversial. Damrosch thought the former gave an impeccable performance, with “impressiveness of exterior, plastic pantomime, clearness of accent and phrasing combine with his majestic voice to produce the most forceful effect.” Schwab too thought Niemann was quite adept in his role, but both Baxter and Hassard thought the tenor was past his prime, noting his tired and husky voice. The handsome Unger, to some, looked the part of the young hero but his singing lacked clear elocution. Baxter though, simply thought the tenor was not youthful-looking enough for the young Siegfried, his body too corpulent (he apparently grew his beard “to hide a double chin”), and his voice too robust and manly:
“his…was more like an overgrown, good-natured country lout, than like the ideal youth of god-like descent.” However, he did find Unger’s heftiness and rugged voice better suited for the part of the mature Siegfried.

All other vocalists, according to the American critics, were deemed to be “competent representatives” of their roles, despite the fatigue which hampered the quality of some of their voices as the performances went on. (This was not surprising as beyond the demanding parts and the sheer length of the operas, some of them held multiple parts). A couple correspondents seemed amazed that their attentions could be sustained over entire acts, with only two or three characters on stage (as in Siegfried). This they attributed to the excellent acting by many of the singers to enliven the dialogue-intensive scenes; Schwab himself found that in general, the dramatic performance of the operas was more compelling than their musical content.

Concerning the orchestra, the journalists expressed unequivocal approval for the ensemble’s efforts each night. Most remarked on the high standard of playing, describing the musicians’ technique as “unparalleled”, even “flawless.” The conductor Damrosch praised the orchestra above all other aspects of the production. He noted the professionalism of the individual players, believing they must have studied their parts at home, then “indefatigably rehearsed” in the theatre, and therefore, “all resulting finally in an ensemble marked by perfect melodic beauty as well as vividness of dramatic execution.” Richter was also highly commended for his leadership; there were otherwise very few remarks on his interpretation of the Ring’s score. Only Hassard observed, with slight disappointment, that the excerpts already familiar to Americans (i.e. the “Ride of the Valkyries” and “Wotan’s Farewell and Magic Fire Music”) were quite a bit slower and less energetic than what he was accustomed to hearing in New York. The difference stemmed, perhaps, from Wagner’s request that Richter follow the singers, and match the speed of the orchestral music to their gestures and actions as well as to the various scenic changes. In reality, Richter’s strict adherence to Wagner’s principle was not always
successful in a purely musical sense, as his accommodation of the complex stage effects or the physical limitations of the singers sometimes resulted in awkward changes in tempi.

The Visual World of the 1876 Ring

Since no images from the performances were made available, Americans had to rely solely on the descriptions provided by the critics to imagine how the Ring cycle’s first presentation was rendered visually. Overall, the American critics found the illusion of the mythical world to be convincingly achieved. They were particularly impressed with the various lighting effects, many of which were produced by innovative techniques, such as the combination of gas and electric lighting to simulate different times of day and changes in weather. “The light is continually changing,” Hassard wrote in amazement, “Night and day, sunshine and storm, follow each other by nice gradations, and even when all the action takes place by day there are shifting lights and shadows as there are in nature.” Wagner’s use of colored light was also thought by the American critics to be quite inventive, such as when red light infused steam to simulate fire at the end of Die Walküre. Hassard and Jackson were both completely convinced by this effect, the latter stating that “it was the most perfect illusion ever witnessed on any stage” though Schwab felt it could have been “far grander and more impressive”. Wagner, of course, would have preferred real fire, but had to resort to this restrained alternative for safety reasons.

Other effects, such as the rainbow bridge, satisfied the American critics if not the Europeans. Wagner had wanted his gods to physically traverse an actual bridge, not merely have the optical effect of a rainbow, as was created by Bähr’s special projector with prisms. The compromise was a solid structure onto which the spectrum was projected, which to some reporters was not entirely effective. Schwab, however, thought the illusion to be “quite creditable”, observing that “[with] a strong light falling upon the many-colored sides of the structure, its substantial framework was not observable.” The Americans were in greatest
disagreement about the magic-lantern projections Wagner employed to show the Valkyries riding through the air. Apparently, Carl Doepler's images depicting the warrior maidens were quite indistinguishable from some parts of the auditorium. From his vantage point, the Times’s critic felt “the dissolving views” were not successful at all, but Hassard felt the illusion was “very well managed”, while Jackson deemed the “Ride of the Valkyries” a “scenic triumph”.

The American reporters were equally impressed with the high level of detail in the painted sets. Since the common practice of opera companies in the U.S. was to compile scenery from available stock, seeing this standard of scenic design, with every aspect tailor-made for the production and overseen by the composer himself, was quite revelatory to many of them. As Hassard commented effusively,

[The scenic effects are] nothing comparable…even in our best theaters…. Every scene is built up with the most minute attention to details…. The scene-painting is magnificent. Every picture shows the sentiment and hand of an artist in idea and treatment. There is none of the false brilliancy and glaring color of the conventional stage decorator; the painting is not theatrical at all, but it is truthful.

Damrosch also found remarkable the realism of the sets, writing that “The decorations were sumptuous and in the finest artistic taste, and the scenic arrangements, conducted by Wagner himself, were extremely effective and often surprising and astonishing in their novelty…and reality.” The Daily Advertiser's Baxter agreed, and even recommended outright that American scene-painters and stage-machinists should study the Bayreuth production as a model for the design of operatic sets in the future.

As other production historians have already pointed out, some of the major stage effects in the Ring's first performance were successfully executed whereas others failed dismally. The swimming Rhinedaughters were among those in the former category, and all critics present were wowed by the effect. According to Schwab, it was the most innovative deployment of stage

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103 The machinist Carl Brandt originally wanted Wagner to adopt the solution used for the 1870 Munich production, which had stable boys and live horses move on a carpeted floor. In this instance, however, Wagner was against this level of realism and remained adamant about using magic lantern projections.


105 New York Sun, 3 Sep 1876, 2.
machinery he had ever seen, and unlike anything he had previously experienced in operatic performances in Paris and London, his benchmark for evaluating productions. Both Jackson and Hassard were amazed with how naturally the singers portraying the watery maidens moved, despite being precariously strapped into Carl Brandt’s cage-like contraptions and wheeled around the stage. The latter could not help revealing this stage secret to his readers, noting that “to the distant spectator the mechanism by which the motions of swimming and floating were so aptly counterfeited…and the illusion was perfect. I believe the women rested on saddles supported by iron rods which their long drapery concealed.”

Other major stage effects, such as Brünnhilde’s immolation and the overflowing of the Rhine at the end of Götterdämmerung, received mixed reactions. Schwab thought the final scene was “uncommonly realistic”, aside from the over-enthusiastic stagehands who “raised the waves worthy of the Atlantic Ocean,” an account that perhaps betrays the memory of his recent crossing. The Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick though, was less kind about the rather inelegant representation of the river, which in his view, wobbled “like the Red Sea in a provincial production of Rossini’s Moses.”

To be sure, the execution of this scene was extremely difficult and had caused great stress and consternation during rehearsals; Richard Fricke himself thought it “worse than poor” in performance. The various steam effects, especially those in Das Rheingold, were also not always convincing. While the steam “curtains” employed during the scenic transitions were “stunning” to Hassard, Schwab noted that Alberich’s transformations into a giant snake and toad “were not at all skillfully managed.”

The mythical creatures of the Ring failed entirely to provide the adequate illusion. The dragon of Siegfried, in particular, was the butt of much criticism. Just three weeks before the Festival, only half of its body had arrived in Bayreuth from Richard Keene’s London studio; the neck piece did not appear until the beginning of August and its head was delivered only in time

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108 See Fricke’s entries for July 26–28 (pp. 88–89), August 9 (p. 93) and August 18 (p. 98) in Wagner in Rehearsal.
for the opera’s first performance. Consequently, the Act II battle with Siegfried was poorly done; Hassard noted that it was “short and to tell the plain truth, rather absurd.” Schwab thought the beast itself was a pathetic excuse for a dragon; as he described:

[It was a] sorry contrivance, resembling a monstrous porgie [a deep-bodied marine food fish] and only able to move backward and forward on rollers, which revolved as though they were square instead of round. This ridiculous brute limited its resistance to Siegfried to emitting a cloud of steam through its ponderous jaws just as the hero was operating upon its tail, and lay down like a lamb directly afterward.

Keene’s other efforts to create realistic-looking animals also did not convince: the papier-mâché rams of Fricka’s chariot near the beginning of Act II in Die Walküre provoked laughter. Even so, attempts to use live mammals, such as the horse sent by King Ludwig to represent Brünnhilde’s Grane, proved too challenging to be effective either.

Concerning the costumes, curiously, several of the American critics approved Carl Doepler’s designs for the very attributes that Wagner wanted him to avoid, namely, historical realism. The Chicago Tribune’s correspondent, W., praised the attire of the gods and humans as “well-researched”, and Schwab commended them as being “of faultless accuracy as far as research and drawings from antiques could make them so.” (One wonders to what “antiques” Schwab was referring!) Schwab also liked the set of the Gibichung hall for the designer’s attention to “historical” detail, which Hassard too, found to be “rich according to the fashions of the primitive age.” Evidently, the critics appeared not to have known that Wagner had hoped for a more timeless (i.e. non-historical) quality to the costumes. Doepler’s historicized vision would continue to persist over the following decade in productions of the Ring outside of Bayreuth, including in New York, for which his original designs were copied religiously.

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109 According to Fricke’s diary entry on August 9, “Another part of the front of the dragon had arrived [for an earlier rehearsal of Siegfried]. I can’t make head or tail out of it, but it seems to me “the pretty trap” is still missing”; Wagner in Rehearsal, 93. The rest of the dragon arrived on August 12; see Fricke, Bayreuth in 1876 (14 August), in Wagner 12, no. 1 (January 1991): 42. As Barry Millington has recently noted, the head did not end up in Beirut (in the Middle East), contrary to the popular myth; see “Faithful, all too Faithful”: Fidelity and Ring Stagings,” in The Opera Quarterly 23, nos. 2–3 (2006): 265–76; 270.

110 For further discussion on Wagner’s concerns about the overtly historical conception of Doepler’s costuming and the building of the Gibichung Hall, see Patrick Carnegy, Wagner and the Art of the Theatre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 81–84.
Perhaps what is most intriguing about the American reportage on the visual elements of the cycle’s production is the critics’ tendency to idealize the actual performances. Even in their detailed descriptions, the journalists nevertheless glossed over some of the more obvious problems that occurred during the Ring’s first presentation. In the Herald review of Das Rheingold, for example, Jackson stated that all the scenic changes “worked like a charm”, with “no noise or delay”. In fact, the transition between the first two scenes had gone gravely wrong: the untimely release of a painted drop had completely exposed the stagehands at work, while Carl Brandt’s commands from the wings were audible to all in the auditorium.111 (The second and third performances proceeded more smoothly.) No comment was made by any of the American correspondents about the noise of the steam machine, which was reported by some European critics to be so distracting that it sometimes drowned out the orchestra in quieter moments. The less-than-ideal staging of the conclusion of Götterdämmerung showing Brünnhilde leading her horse Grane through a backdrop was described by several critics as if the soprano Amalie Materna had indeed “sprang upon its back and sang her farewell”; none expressed disappointment over the awkwardness of its actual presentation. Possibly the oddest of such romanticized accounts was Jackson’s description of the staging of the “Ride of the Valkyries”. Not only did he neglect to mention the painted slides used to depict the warrior maidens in flight but provided instead the following fantastical interpretation:

One of the grandest effects ever produced on the stage was the camp of the Walkuren in the third act. The war maidens on horseback, each with a slain warrior lying across her saddle bow, dashed across the stage among crags and fir trees, all singing the wild chant, the Walküre motif, brandishing their spears and shaking burnished shields.112

Taken together, these concerted efforts of American critics to downplay—or sometimes completely omit—the faulty aspects of the Ring’s inaugural performance in their reviews shows, once again, the extent to which they were “pro-Wagner.” To them, the problems of the cycle’s

first full staging were negligible—“a few spots on the sun”, as Baxter described them—
compared to the huge achievement they witnessed. Clearly, the journalists were eager to
emphasize and impress on their American readers the merits of Wagner’s staging. This aim
also frames their extended discussion on what they believed to be the cultural significance of
the Ring cycle and its premiere.

General Assessments and Reflections

Although Wagner himself was far from satisfied with his first production of the Ring
cycle, the response of the American critics was unequivocally positive; that is, they felt it was a
success. Hassard’s verdict for the New York Tribune was enthusiastic:

Let me satisfy doubtful inquirers at once the performance is one of the most stupendous
successes the stage has ever witnessed. The most extravagant expectations which
have been formed abroad of the effect of this music, sung as the composer meant it
should be sung, with stage effects, and an orchestra of exceptional size and beauty, are
very far surpassed by the reality. […] The victory of Wagner is overwhelming.

In close agreement, Schwab described the Ring cycle’s premiere as a “very remarkable event in
the history of musical and dramatic art.” Even those who opposed Wagner would be hard-
pressed to say that his Bayreuth venture was a failure, he asserted, for “rarely has a composer
in a new style achieved such success at the first performance of a great work.” In Schwab’s
view, Wagner’s endeavor triumphed because of the uncommonly high standard to which each
element of the production was accomplished. He noted, in particular, the specially-constructed
opera house, the cast of first-rate singers, the well-rehearsed orchestra, and the rich scenery
and virtuosic scenic effects. All this, the Times’ critic wrote admiringly, was only made possible
through Wagner’s absolute, “Brahma-like” control over the whole enterprise. Likewise the Daily
Advertiser’s Baxter proclaimed that “success is the verdict to be rendered on every feature of
the greatest art undertaking every carried out by the courage, energy and will of any one man.”

Along with highlighting the positive in their reviews, American critics also avoided
sensationalist reporting of events that might put Wagner or the Festival in a less favorable light.
Such was the case with the controversy surrounding the composer’s impromptu speech following the conclusion of the cycle’s premiere. After rounds of applause and cheers from the audience, Wagner was finally persuaded to step out on stage to offer a few words. Unfortunately, his address did not come across smoothly; one line, in particular, stood out. According to various newspapers, he was quoted as saying “Sie sahen jetzt was wir können, nun wollen sie, haben sie den Willen, wir haben eine Kunst”, which the Advertiser’s Baxter translated as “You have now seen what we can do; now if you will, if you are so disposed, we have an art.” Sensing he might have been misunderstood, Wagner modified his statement in the formal speech he gave at the celebratory banquet the next day. What he intended to say, he explained, was that Germany now had a “new art” (“eine neue Kunst”), that is, the music-drama, one which was free from foreign (i.e. French or Italian) influences.

Wagner’s apparent blunder immediately had the European media buzzing. As Schneider has pointed out, some critics reported that the composer’s initial statement had insulted them and many others in the audience because he implied that before his Ring cycle, there had been no art. Such a remark confirmed to them Wagner’s massive egotism. Others were only slightly more forgiving, citing the incident as yet another instance of the composer’s ineloquence. But remarkably, the situation barely registered in the American papers. Neither Jackson nor Neuendorff, and not even Damrosch discussed it in their reviews, thus suggesting they might have simply ignored the entire episode. Baxter merely hinted there might have been a minor misunderstanding. Only Schwab provided an extended report about the controversy, but it was conveyed in a decidedly neutral manner. As he recounted in the New York Times:

[Wagner] first attached himself mainly to correcting the impression produced by the few words he had spoken on the previous night. He had then been understood to say that, thanks to him, Germany had now an art. He had no thought of such an assertion, he said, and merely meant to declare that just as France had a distinctively French [art] and Italy a distinctively Italian opera, so Germany, if content with what he and his artists had done, could now have a purely German combination of music and the drama. This statement having been received with applause—and also with genuine pleasure, for the

unskillful form and imperfect understanding of Herr Wagner’s words on Thursday had caused an opinion to prevail that the composer’s well-known vanity was still on the increase—the speaker proceeded to compliment the artists, the committee, and the burghers of Bayreuth.

In their deeper considerations of Wagner’s achievement, the American critics reflected on what they believed to be the significance the *Ring* cycle and its effect on the composer’s position within the broad history of music. Two main perspectives prevailed. Some of the journalists viewed the composer’s operatic theories as realized in the *Ring* project as the natural result of a logical evolution of music; as one critic saw it, from the passions of Bach, through Gluck’s *Iphigenia* and Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony: “Wagner was rowing with the current of musical progress, not against it.” Damrosch assumed this view as well, writing in the *New York Sun*, “looking backward on the line from Wagner’s position, we first arrive at a real sense of the logical sequence with which all the arts, music, in especial, have developed, and so can better recognize and reproduce the style of each individual composer.” Yet, while he believed Wagner’s *Ring* signaled a “new epoch in art”, he did not believe the older art form (that is, Italian opera), nor the appreciation of it, would become obsolete. He argued, rather, that one’s valuation of the “olden masters” would be raised, since through Wagner’s music, one can come to understand these artworks as individual directions within the same genre. Such statements indicate some of the more diplomatic taste-shaping tactics used to woo Americans to embrace Wagner music-drama, that is, as part of an expanding universal repertory of operatic works.

The other perspective adopted by critics was Wagner as a revolutionary figure, who broke away from earlier operatic traditions; the *Ring* was thus upheld as the ultimate example of how he emancipated the genre from the strictures of the Italian (or French) form. Hassard certainly felt this way:

[The experiment] is the attempt of a single man to reconstruct according to his own ideas not only the forms of the opera after they have been long established by the common consent of all civilized nations, but indirectly many of the rules of musical composition in general, the fashions of the stage, and to some extent the methods of all dramatic

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poetry. [...] Wagner has undertaken...not to modify but to destroy and rebuild. His success means nothing less than revolution.

In a similar vein, Jackson of the Herald thought that Wagner’s innovations were, by and large, for the betterment of the genre, regardless whether one liked them or not. As he wrote, Wagner had rightly “stripped the lyric drama of much of its clumsy trappings” replacing it with the “music drama—the evolution of a musical subject by a process which is the highest form of art.”

According to Damrosch, it was more specifically the augmented roles of the singer, the orchestra, and the listener and their relationship to the drama’s performance and reception that constituted Wagner’s musical revolution as birthed in the Ring. About these aspects, he dutifully educated his readers about what they should expect, and what would be expected of them, when they encountered any of the cycle’s operas. As he explained:

The singer will have to be distinct in enunciation, and the auditor no longer be allowed to leave his wits at home and give himself up to the mere satisfaction of the ear. The singer, moreover, will have, along with his own part, to give especial study to the orchestral accompaniment, because in it is contained everything which can best lead him up to, and qualify him for, the finest shading in the expression and action of his role. [...] the performance of the orchestra player will have to undergo modification. In Wagner’s compositions there is not a single element of the action with which the orchestra is not forced to be in closest sympathy. [...] No longer, as formerly, will all importance be laid on a mere musically good execution of the melody; but the musician who wishes to do justice to Wagner must at every instant be in full consciousness of the dramatic action on the stage; and in the enlarged responsibility thus acquired, must recognize the duty of staking his whole intellectual self on the success of the grand but difficult problem.

Whatever the vantage point, both arguments nevertheless served to support the critics’ endorsement to their American readers of the Ring cycle’s significance to a universal history of art and culture. Neuendorff was certain that the work would insure Wagner’s immortality for epochs to come, as did Jackson, who admitted that the “Ring of the Nibelungen’ will stand as a model for future generations of the highest dramatic and musical character.” But there was one who was not so convinced of this: the notable American skeptic of Wagner’s theories and operas, John Sullivan Dwight. Curiously, he published his own opinions about the cycle, even though he did not make the pilgrimage to Bayreuth himself. As they are a foil to his compatriots’
enthusiastic assessments, his criticisms are worth a brief examination here.

As Harold Briggs has already observed, Dwight, the man and critic, had assumed a staunchly anti-Wagnerian position by the 1870s.\textsuperscript{115} To what extent his aesthetic views and predilections informed any decision on his part to not make the long journey to Bayreuth is unknown. But given his influential position, it seems remarkable that he did not go (after all, plenty of Wagner skeptics were present at the \textit{Ring} premiere). Moreover, Dwight had been adamant in earlier days that full judgments about the composer’s music should be reserved until his operas were seen, fully staged, as according to his theories. It is thus rather peculiar that he did not find it even a bit disingenuous to assess the merits of the cycle based mostly on what he read in the papers, as well as “our careful reading of Wagner’s four librettos, with more or less dipping into the piano arrangements of the scores.”\textsuperscript{116}

Dwight expressed strong reservations about the \textit{Ring}; not surprisingly, his opinion was shaped by his own philosophical and aesthetic views about music and society, a framework within which the “music of the future” never comfortably fit. For one, he questioned the cycle’s plot, with its myriad of mythological, “shadowy, and un-moral” characters (as opposed to human ones), and about its meaningfulness and moral relevance for its audience. As he opined, “The legendary subject matter of the drama, the strange medley of gods, giants, monsters, heroes, and incestuous lovers […] is, save as material for picturesque and brilliant spectacle, essentially bewildering and tedious.” Furthermore, he felt that Wagner’s particular blend of poetry and music did not help to enhance the drama’s appeal, writing that the “music comes only into a very forced connection with much of its protracted dialogue, which is more interesting and intelligible when merely read, than it can be when sung or musically recited.” Dwight took issue with the overabundance of recitative-like writing, believing that Wagner had mistakenly traded in structured operatic numbers, for the sake of the natural progression of the drama. In fact, the

\textsuperscript{115} See Briggs’ examination of Dwight’s criticisms on Wagner’s music between 1860 and 1881 in Chapter 6 of “Richard Wagner and American Literary Activity,” 191–235.
\textsuperscript{116} “The First Bayreuthiad”, “DJM 36, no. 12, 302.
critic argued, arias, ensembles and choruses are “natural forms of music”, offering instances of “spontaneous inspiration and expression”, in which the listener can revel momentarily in the beauty of the music.

Yet, this ability to appreciate beautiful art, in Dwight’s view, depended on the listener having a certain emotional detachment from the music being heard, while actively extracting its meaning intellectually. Wagner’s music, however, tended to overwhelm this process, and was thus, considered to be “decadent”. Dwight was wary of the overpowering emotional effect that appeared to be bound up in the Ring’s score, based on reports he had read about audience members being strongly affected by the performances. To him, even the developing motives in the orchestral part appeared to lack true ingenuity, being “simply so many labels attached to the several persons and things to be remembered in the plot, -- a very different thing from a thematic germ developing itself according to the intrinsic laws of music.” (One wonders if Dwight had actually seen the Ring in live performance, whether he might have reversed his opinion in this respect, as the English critic James A. Davison appeared to have.) Ultimately, the Ring cycle seemed to Dwight to be an elaborate contrivance, created to engulf the senses, rather than to inspire humanity in a deeply moral sense. “What is this Nibelungen play,” he wondered, “but Melodramatic spectacle on a vast scale, with grandiose plot, and an extremely brilliant, effective orchestral accompaniment, the audience (spectators) sitting ‘in the dark’ before the mighty magic lantern?”

How did the American reporters of the Festival respond to Dwight’s assessments? Curiously, there is no evidence of a publicized “war of words” between them, unlike among the European media, as Schneider and Großmann-Vendrey have shown. Perhaps these journalists,

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118 According to Muir’s analysis of Davison’s reviews to the 1876 Ring, Davison appeared to have understood, and responded positively to, Wagner’s manipulation of motives for aesthetic and dramatic effect, and not as just mere signposts in the drama. See “Wagner in England,” 43–66.
whose pro-Wagner views were in ascendency at this time, saw Dwight's position as outmoded, and thus, did not merit further engagement. Since he had not witnessed the Bayreuth performances, the credibility of his criticisms was probably questioned. In the ensuing years, Dwight continued to provide his readers with occasional articles and reviews on Wagner and his music, but ultimately, his conservative perspective on the “music of the future” inevitably made his Journal of Music increasingly irrelevant in light of the still-growing American interest in the composer’s operas. In September 1881, after a struggle to maintain subscribers, Dwight ceased its publication.

*American Responses to Foreign Reviews*

It is worth noting that along with the extensive reportage of the American correspondents, there were also efforts to make European reviews about the 1876 Bayreuth Festival available to Americans. Translated excerpts from the Parisian Ménestrel and Le Figaro, the Asmedeo of Milan, and the Musical Times, the Times, and the Spectator of London appeared in Dwight's Journal of Music. Dwight also devoted an exceptionally large amount of column space to the criticisms of Eduard Hanslick of the Neue Freie Presse in Vienna, and Joseph Bennett of the London Daily Telegraph. Foreign articles appeared as well in American newspapers, although to a more limited extent. The New York Times and the Boston Daily Advertiser, for example, included a couple commentaries on the French view of the Ring's premiere by their Parisian correspondents. The New Yorker Staats-Zeitung reproduced Paul Lindau’s reviews for the Berlin weekly, Die Gegenwart. Taken together, these articles gave

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120 See p. 303 of "The First Bayreuthiad."
121 Dwight's sources for Hanslick's articles were via the German-American paper, the New York Demokrat (which he probably translated himself) and from English translations in the London Musical World. They are reprinted in the following issues of DJM 36: "The Upshot of Wagnerism. –Edward Hanslick's Summing Up," no. 13 (30 Sep 1876): 310–11; and "Dr. Hanslick on the “Ring des Nibelungen”," no.16 (11 Nov 1876): 329–30. Bennett's reviews appear in these issues: "The Nibelungen Trilogy at Bayreuth," no. 14 (14 Oct 1876): 313–15; no. 15 (28 Oct 1876): 322–23; and "The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth," no. 17 (25 Nov 1876): 337–38. These were the more concise versions of the Telegraph reviews that Bennett published in two parts for the London Musical Times, on 1 September and 1 November 1876. For an in-depth examination of Bennett's reviews of the Ring cycle’s premiere in Bayreuth, see Chapter 3 of Muir’s “Wagner in England,” 67–122.
American readers some idea about European opinions on the *Ring* cycle’s premiere.

This group of foreign reviews, however, predominantly highlighted the reactions of Wagner skeptics. The response of American journalists to them appears to show various attempts at spin control, though for different ideological aims. In Dwight’s view, the pro-Wagner zeal of the American critics needed to be balanced out. To this end, he sought to provide his readers with what he considered to be more discriminating judgments of the cycle’s performances, hence, his inclusion of the extensive responses of Hanslick and Bennett in his journal. Other commentators, however, referred to the articles in order to criticize the Old-World opposition to Wagner, especially that of Germans. Even nearly twenty years after the 1876 Festival, Henry T. Finck, still a passionate defender of Wagner’s music, felt it necessary to severely chastise certain German critics for their “unjustly” negative responses towards the *Ring*’s first performances.122 Calling Hanslick and Lindau, among others, as “amusing specimens” of the “disdain and hate of genius”, he blamed “their persistent misrepresentation of Wagner” and “their ridiculing of his enterprise” as a major cause of the lack of German support for the composer’s Bayreuth endeavor.123

While Finck’s assertion that these German critics were bent on destroying Wagner was greatly exaggerated, his discursive strategy of pitting the “conservative” Germans against the “radical” composer was nevertheless effective spin in the American context. By casting Wagner as the revolutionary figure whose genius was unappreciated, rejected even, by his own countrymen, Americans could step in and claim Wagner and his music as their own. That a significant number of Americans had responded to the composer’s appeals to support the *Ring* project and make the pilgrimage to Bayreuth, was a source of pride for them. They believed, moreover, that these actions signaled to Europeans their cultural advancement and progressivism. Josiah G. Holland (1819–1881), founder of the American cultural magazine

122 See WW, 367–75.
123 Op. cit., 297. Finck also charged the German critics for needlessly inciting the scandal that followed Wagner’s speech at the conclusion of the first cycle; see pp. 307–12.
Scribner’s Monthly, went as far as to credit the open-mindedness of Americans for the success of the first Bayreuth Festival. As he proclaimed,

To the credit of the musical taste of America be it said, however, that the great man’s mastership was heartily acknowledged here before the triumph at Bayreuth. His victory was easier, perhaps, in that our people were less settled than those of the old world in the conventional forms of musical expression. In other words, they had less to unlearn than those who knew more.  

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Although in many ways the inaugural performances of the Ring cycle were deemed a critical success, in financial terms, however, the festival was a total failure. In the end, the endeavor incurred Wagner a large deficit of 148,000 marks (approximately $37,500 in American dollars) which inevitably needed to be paid back. Under such circumstances, another Festival within the following year was impossible; in fact, the next one did not occur until 1882, when Wagner’s final work, Parsifal, was premiered. Meanwhile, the composer was obliged to search for ways to raise money to cover his debts. As a solution, he eventually revised his initial idea that the Ring would only be performed at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, and thus permitted the cycle to be staged in other German cities and on a European tour. At last, here were the first trials of whether the Nibelungen operas could be successfully mounted in theatres outside Bayreuth and still appeal to audiences. Across the Atlantic, with impressions of the 1876 Festival still fresh on their minds, some Americans were already devising opportunities to present them on American soil.

Chapter III – New World Encounters of the Nibelungen Kind: First Attempts at Staging the Ring and the Music of the Cycle in the United States, 1877–1884

“I must tell you in confidence that a notion of settling permanently in America with my family, my ideas and my works, is taking deep root in me.” […] I am almost inclined to let the whole thing depend on the attitude of the Americans towards my offer.”

--Letter from Wagner to Friedrich Feustel, 8 Mar 1880.1

More than a quarter century after Wagner first thought about moving to the United States with his “Nibelung trilogy”, he was once again considering crossing the Atlantic. He was thereby imagining a way out from his financial woes, notably, to escape the huge debts incurred from the 1876 Bayreuth Festival. He also hoped to ensure the longevity of his theatre and the future of the festival. After investigating a number of possible solutions, none of which proved effective, Wagner began to contemplate not just an extended business venture to America to amass funds, but the possibility of emigration from Germany.2 In the summer of 1877, Wagner informed his closest associates—Friedrich Feustel, King Ludwig II, and Hans von Wolzogen—of his intentions, pointing out that he already had offers from well-known U.S. touring opera impresarios Carl Rosa and Bernard Ullmann.3 But whether Wagner was actually serious about moving forward with these plans at the time is questionable. More likely he was testing his colleagues, perhaps even hoping that the news would shock them into rescuing him from his financial predicament.4 That he did not set off immediately and, in fact, did not consider the matter of emigration to America again until 1879, suggests that he might have been buying time.

In July 1879, the matter of the Festival’s future, and that of his newest work Parsifal,

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1 LRW, 294.
2 See Wagner’s letter to Friedrich Feustel on 23 Nov 1876, in SL, 860–63; also Wagner’s letter to Ludwig Strecker on 28 Mar 1877, in LRW, 283. In May 1877, Wagner went to London to conduct a series of concerts featuring excerpts from his works for the purposes of raising funds to cover his deficit. Unfortunately, the endeavor proved to be completely unprofitable.
3 See Cosima’s diary entry for 24 Jun 1877, in CWD 1, 969.
4 In response, King Ludwig had written to Wagner in June 1877, imploring him to “abandon this dreadful plan. All Germans would be indelibly stained, were they to allow the departure of their greatest man, and were they not prepared to starve in order to sustain their supreme genius in their fatherland. […] Your roses will not grow on America’s sterile soil, where selfishness, lovelessness, and Mammon hold sway.” Translated by Rudolph Sabor in The Real Wagner (London: André Deutsch), 234–35. Ludwig, however, did not offer financial help to Wagner at this time.
weighed heavily on Wagner’s mind. He wanted to produce the opera, but only if he was assured financial security so that “performances [of it] can be given every three years, financed from the interest of capital.” The issue led to increasingly serious thoughts about America, and by November, Wagner pondered going there to “make his fortune”, so that he could independently sustain his enterprise. With renewed fervor, he penned on February 8, 1880 a proposal to his American dentist, Dr. Newell Sill Jenkins, outlining his desire to emigrate and the conditions he required to do so. In this now-famous proposition, he demanded a “lump sum of one million dollars”, half to pay for his settlement and the other half to be invested, as well as the guarantee of funds, which will be raised by “the association” (presumably, the one which will bring him to the U.S.), to enable an annual festival of his works, starting with the premiere of Parsifal.

Jenkins was immediately skeptical that such a scheme would work but as he recalled in his personal Reminiscences, it was initially difficult to persuade Wagner otherwise. By March and April, the composer had informed several of his close associates, including Feustel, of his intentions. Writing to Jenkins in July, Wagner stated that he wanted to travel in September of the following year. But as summer turned to autumn, he decided to mount Parsifal at Bayreuth after all, and the idea of permanent American immigration was reduced to a short trip of “five months in North America (September 1881 to April 1882)” in order “to give me an independent

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5 CWD 2, 7 Jul 1879, 335–36.
7 Wagner met Jenkins in September 1877 when the reputable, Dresden-based dentist was invited to Wahnfried by Cosima for an emergency operation on the composer (Jenkins already treated her and their children). A friendship developed soon after, one that was certainly close enough for Wagner to trust Jenkins with his American plans (Wagner otherwise consulted no other American directly about it). On their relationship from Jenkins’s perspective, see “Recollections of Villa Wahnfried from Wagner’s American Dentist,” introduced and annotated by Thomas S. Grey, in Richard Wagner and His World, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 237–47; c.f. Newell Sill Jenkins, Reminiscences of Newell Sill Jenkins (Princeton: private printing, 1924). On Jenkins’s dental career, see John M. Hyson and Scott D. Swank, “Dr. Newell Sill Jenkins: Progenitor of Cosmetic Dentistry,” in CDA Journal 31, no. 8 (August 2003): 626–29.
9 See letter to Feustel dated 4 Mar 1880; note 1. According to Cosima’s diary entry for 30 Mar, he drafted a letter to King Ludwig expressing his thoughts of America but whether this was actually sent is not clear; in April, Wagner also told Prof. Dr. Otto von Schrön of his American plans; CWD 2, 460 and 463.
livelihood."\textsuperscript{10} By mid-October, the entire plan was completely abandoned, for King Ludwig had provided the financial and artistic resources to produce \textit{Parsifal} at the \textit{Festspielhaus} in 1882. For Wagner, the American dream was no longer necessary.

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The composer’s circumstances at this time merit recounting here, for it helps put into context his contradictory—and essentially, delusionary—perceptions about the reality of American musical life. On the one hand, as his proposal to Jenkins shows, Wagner thought Americans might be amenable to support him through a kind of sponsorship which would allow him to live independently to create his art, while his works would be ensured longevity through their consistent presentation at an annual festival. In other words, such support would allow him and his operas to endure outside the commercial trappings of the “opera industry”. Yet, in the U.S., where the for-profit model of opera production prevailed, Americans were not likely to be ready for this arrangement, and the dentist was probably right to dissuade the composer and his family from the idea of emigrating. It is worth noting in this regard that probably only a few Americans in the U.S. actually knew of Wagner’s plan to move across the Atlantic; it was never made public knowledge.

On the other hand, Wagner also believed that he could “make his fortune” in the United States, perhaps because he thought Americans were sufficiently interested—or guileless—to pay large fees to hear and see his works (as he might have assumed from his experience with the profitable \textit{Centennial March} commission). This was also an unrealistic assessment because while American awareness and appreciation of Wagner’s music were certainly on the rise following the 1876 Bayreuth Festival, these years still offered a challenging environment for his operas. This period, up until the beginning of the German seasons at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1884, constituted another phase of exposure and assimilation of the \textit{Ring} cycle’s

\textsuperscript{10} Letter to Feustel dated 1 Oct 1880; LRW, 296. See also Cosima’s diary entries for 1, 6, 20, and 26 Sep 1880; in CWD 2, 531–44.
music in the United States, including the first fully-staged, American production of Die Walküre. Performed by the Fryer-Neuendorff company in New York and Boston in 1877, it was one which later generations of critics dismissed as not worth remembering. Yet, these early performances, in the view of Joseph Horowitz, succeeded in offering Americans “their first opportunity to experience something like mature Wagnerian music drama.” Horowitz did not expand on this comment, and his claim invites further investigation. A close examination of these first staged performances of Die Walküre reveals the significant musical and theatrical challenges that the opera presented at the very beginning of its performance history in the U.S. An analysis of the press reception also uncovers the struggle of critics to respond to less-than-ideal stagings of what was to them Wagner’s newest and most significant work.

Part I: The Fryer-Neuendorff Wagner Festival of 1877

Not surprisingly, following the recent strong attendance of Americans at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival and the critical attention paid to the world premiere of the Ring cycle, there arose a wave of fresh interest in the staging of Wagner’s operas in the United States. Der fliegende Holländer was given its American debut by the Pappenheim opera company in Italian translation, on November 8, 1876, at Philadelphia’s Academy of Music. Several months later, in March 1877, the same opera was performed in an English version at Boston’s Globe Theatre. In New York, the conductor Adolf Neuendorff had planned a German-language production of Holländer at the Academy of Music, but it appears these performances did not materialize. Ultimately, it was J.C. Fryer, a notable New York impresario, who had the most ambitious scheme of all: in early 1877, he arranged to put on an American “Wagner Festival” in New York

11 For example, Henry Krehbiel remarked in Chapters of Opera, his record of New York operatic life, that “memories of that production were painful when they were not amusing”; (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1909; reprinted New York: Da Capo, 1980), 132. Over two decades later, Gustav Kobbé rejected the premiere outright as not a “real performance”; see his article, “Wagner in New York,” Review of Reviews (1899): 688.
13 According to Dwight’s Journal of Music, these presentations were supposed to have taken place on December 25, 26, 28, 30, and January 1 and 2. See 36, no. 13 (30 Sept 1876): 312. The absence of advertisements and reviews in the New York papers about these performances suggests that they did not take place.
and Boston, featuring staged performances of several of the composer’s operas. To lead his company and orchestra, he selected Neuendorff as musical director. By early February, details of the projected event were publicized in the American press. As the New York Times reported:

The admirers of Wagner’s music—and, in the United States, they are by no means few—will be glad to learn that a “Wagner Festival” will be held in this City during the fortnight commencing on March 12. The proposed solemnité—to borrow a French word particularly expressive, we think, of the nature of the affair—is to include representations of “Lohengrin,” “Tannhäuser,” “Der Fliegende Holländer,” and “Die Walküre,” these operas being produced at the Academy of Music, with a powerful distribution of roles, a strong orchestra, and appropriate scenery. The projector and manager of this festival is Mr. J.C. Fryer, well-known in connection with operatic enterprises, and the musical director is Mr. Adolph Neuendorff. A force of 60+ of the best instrumentalists has already been organized, and, thus far, arrangements have been made with the artists whose names follow. Mr. Fryer’s company embraces Mmes. Pappenheim and Perl, Messrs. Bischoff, Fritsch, Preusser, Blum, and Formes. In sum, it was to be the country’s first operatic festival entirely devoted to Wagner’s works, including the American premiere of Die Walküre. Amid the “spin” surrounding the event, the media did not hesitate to emphasize that Americans were ready, now more than ever before, for such an affair. In the view of “H.C.C.” of the Christian Advocate:

The Wagner festival in New York will afford the musical public superior advantages for studying the 'music of the future,' and it must be admitted that the Wagnerian school has already seemed [to have] a firm foothold in America. Perhaps in no country have the compositions and achievements of Richard Wagner attracted much more attention than this.

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The Fryer-Neuendorff Wagner Festival took place spread over four weeks in the spring of 1877: two weeks at New York’s Academy of Music between March 12 and 23, and two weeks in Boston at the Boston Theatre, from March 26 to 31 and April 16 to 21 (see Figure 3.1a). The company was reportedly scheduled to go to Philadelphia and Chicago as well but these plans were not fulfilled. As advertised, the program consisted of staged performances of Der

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14 Very little is known at this time about the life and career of J.C. Fryer. Newspaper advertisements and articles of the period suggest he was an active impresario of the theatre in New York and Philadelphia during the late nineteenth century.
16 Christian Advocate, 1 Mar 1877, 139.
17 Chicago Tribune, 18 Mar 1877, 2. The Pappenheim-Adams German and Italian opera company brought Die
fliegende Holländer, Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, and Die Walküre; in Boston, concert excerpts from the latter were also given, along with Beethoven’s Fidelio. All works were performed with the original German text and audiences were told to expect “complete” (i.e. uncut) presentations, with “adequate scenic effects and accessories.” Fryer hired principal singers of predominantly German origin, most of whom who were not familiar to American opera-goers at the Academy of Music (see Figure 3.1b). One exception was the star soprano of the company, Eugenie Pappenheim, who had sang the roles of Senta and Elsa previously at the Academy, and now assumed the demanding task of portraying them as well as Elisabeth and Brünnhilde during the Festival.¹⁸ The orchestra, comprised of fifty-six “of the best musicians in New York” under Neuendorff’s direction, was small by Wagnerian standards, although quite substantial for American theatres (see Figure 3.1c). Tickets were set at relatively low prices: it was advertised in the New York papers that for a single performance, reserved seats were $2, general admission $1, family circle 50 cents (reserved tickets in this section were $1) and boxes $8 and $10. Similarly at the Boston Theatre, the cost of tickets ranged between 50 cents for gallery seats to $2.50 in the orchestra section, according to box office receipts from the period. To ensure Americans were suitably prepared, a sixteen-page explanatory program book (or “manifesto”, as one critic called it) had been created and was freely distributed to the audience. It contained specific information about the Festival, as well as several excerpts reprinted from newspaper articles, including Frederick Schwab’s synopsis and review of the 1876 Bayreuth performance of Die Walküre that had originally appeared in the New York Times.¹⁹

¹⁸ Viennese by birth, Pappenheim (1849–1924) spent her early career as an opera singer in Leipzig, Vienna, Berlin and Hamburg. She made her American debut in October 1875 as a member of Theodore Wachtel’s Grand Opera Company, singing the role of Valentine in Les Huguenots at New York’s Academy of Music. Subsequently, she performed frequently on both sides of the Atlantic, though eventually, she resigned from stage life and settled in New York to teach singing.

¹⁹ Program booklet entitled “The Wagner Opera Festival, Academy of Music, New York,” Boston Public Library. The information for Figure 3.1 was compiled from this source.
Figure 3.1. The Fryer-Neuendorff Wagner Festival in New York and Boston, 1877.

a. Festival Performance Schedule.

**Academy of Music, New York**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Work(s) Performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 12</td>
<td><em>Der fliegende Holländer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, March 14</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, March 15</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin (Brooklyn)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, March 16</td>
<td><em>Der fliegende Holländer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, March 17</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin (matinee)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 19</td>
<td><em>Tannhäuser</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, March 21</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, March 23</td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 2</td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, April 3</td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
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*Original scheduled performance

**Boston Theatre, Boston**

**First Wagner Opera Festival**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Works Performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 26</td>
<td><em>Die fliegende Holländer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, March 27</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, March 28</td>
<td><em>Tannhäuser</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, March 29</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, March 30</td>
<td>“Tone Pictures” from <em>Die Walküre</em> – “The Fire Charm”, “The Ride of the Valkyries”; “Introduction to the Second Act” <em>Die fliegende Holländer [Die Walküre originally scheduled but postponed]</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, March 31</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin</em></td>
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**Second Wagner Opera Festival**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Works Performed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 16</td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, April 17</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, April 18</td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, April 19</td>
<td><em>Fidelio</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, April 20</td>
<td><em>Der fliegende Holländer with Act I of Die Walküre [Fidelio originally scheduled]</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, April 21</td>
<td><em>Fidelio (matinee)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b. Cast List for *Die Walküre.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Performer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brünnhilde</td>
<td>Eugenie Pappenheim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sieglinde</td>
<td>Pauline Canissa (debut)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricka</td>
<td>Madame Listner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerhilde</td>
<td>Freda de Gebele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegmund</td>
<td>A. Bischoff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunding</td>
<td>A. Blum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wotan</td>
<td>Felix Preusser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valkyries</td>
<td>Freda de Gebele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss Grimminger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss Cooney</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Heerwagen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Collasius</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss Hoffmann</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Weinhold</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Picaneser</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

c. Orchestration.

- 10 Violins I
- 6 Violins II
- 4 Violas
- 4 Celli
- 5 Basses
- 4 Harpists
- 2 Flutes
- 1 Piccolo
- 2 Oboes
- 1 English Horn
- 2 Clarinets
- 1 Bass Clarinet
- 3 Bassoons
- 4 French Horns
- 2 Trumpets
- 3 Trombones
- 1 Tuba
- 1 Tympani

The American Premiere of *Die Walküre* in New York: Performance and Reception

Since our subject is Wagner’s *Ring,* we shall focus here only on the premieres of *Die Walküre* in New York and Boston. Among the operas presented at the Fryer-Neuendorff Festival, *Die Walküre* was by far the most anticipated. Although Wagner would have objected to the impresario’s decision to present only this opera from the cycle, Fryer targeted this work presumably for practical reasons. Of the four operas, *Die Walküre* required the least number of complex stage effects, and could be more easily adapted for performance at New York’s Academy of Music and the Boston Theatre. (Compared to the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus,* these theatres were constructed in the mid-century, and though outfitted with stage technology that was suitable for the staging of grand opera, the complexity of the transitional effects in *Das Rheingold,* for example, was clearly beyond the capabilities of their existing machinery.) As the *New York Tribune’s* critic explained, “Mr. Fryer chose the ‘Walküre’ for the crowning effort of his
Wagner season because it is the only one of the four divisions of the Bayreuth festival play which embraces no spectacular effects and requires no mechanism which the ordinary resources of our theatres cannot furnish.”

Other American critics offered additional justifications. In the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, it was observed that from the cycle, *Die Walküre* was the most suited for stand-alone presentation, since its plot does not require prior knowledge of *Rheingold*, nor was its conclusion so open-ended that it necessitated the performance of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* as well. Moreover, the story was easy to follow with plenty of dramatic action, and attractive, in that—according to the *Times* critic—it “deals with personages and passions appealing more powerfully to human sympathy than the myths which the composer generally chooses for lyric illustration.” Musically, in the opinion of the *Staats-Zeitung*’s correspondent, *Die Walküre* did not demand too much from the listener, as there were “not too many leitmotivs to learn”, and those that do appear are easily identifiable within the drama’s context. The orchestral excerpts from this opera were also likely the most familiar to Americans as they were the first to be broadly disseminated in concerts. Fryer must have thought it appropriate to capitalize on his audiences’ prior experiences.

In his promotion of the American premiere of *Die Walküre*, Fryer’s main strategy was to emphasize that his company’s production was a very close—if not exact—replica of the 1876 Festival staging. Patrick Carnegy has argued that the huge influence of this Bayreuth production on subsequent representations of the cycle’s operas by other late-nineteenth-century opera companies arose largely from practical considerations:

Such were the difficulties of staging [Wagner’s] works that theatres far and wide were only too grateful for the Bayreuth ‘models’. They had absolutely no wish to alter the

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21 *New York Times*, 3 Apr 1877, 4; *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 3 Apr 1877, 5. The story of Wotan and Fricka, of course, continues from events in *Das Rheingold*, yet the action of *Die Walküre* is not heavily dependent on the preceding work.
productions, other than to make the operas performable on their own stages and for audiences not always as dedicated as those at Bayreuth.\textsuperscript{22}

While this may be true, claims to Bayreuth authenticity were also made to establish the credibility of a company’s production. About Fryer’s \textit{Die Walküre}, the \textit{Boston Globe} advertised that it would have “entire new scenery, specially made from the original designs furnished for the production of this extraordinary work, under the composer’s own direction at Bayreuth, in August, 1876, together with new costumes and properties, the requisite optical effect, etc.”\textsuperscript{23} Fryer also promised his prospective American audience an experience akin to attending the performances at the Bayreuth Festival. Several newspapers mentioned some of the Wagnerian practices used at the \textit{Festspielhaus} that the American premiere would also employ. The \textit{New York Times}’s critic informed, for instance, that:

\begin{quote}
During the progress of the representations, we observe, several of the details of the Bayreuth solemnité are to be reproduced. While “Die Walküre” is sung, the Academy is to be kept in total darkness, so that attention must be concentrated upon the stage. A fanfare of trumpets sounded in front of the house just previous to the beginning of each act will summon straggling dilettanti to their seats. Incidents of this sort may not be considered as of great importance, but they certainly heightened the effectiveness of the festival at Bayreuth.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Perhaps the most provocative news circulated about the Wagner Festival concerned Fryer’s engagement of Neuendorff to conduct the performances. Keen to establish Neuendorff’s authority, the impresario had the following printed in the introduction of the program booklet (italics mine for emphasis):

\begin{quote}
The Director is furthermore fortunate in commanding the valuable services of Mr. Adolph Neuendorff, the eminent conductor, who not only enjoys the advantage of having assisted at the late festival at Bayreuth, when Wagner’s supreme work, “\textit{The Ring of the Nibelungs},” was given with such memorable effect, but who was also honored with copies of the score, together with special instructions from the composer, concerning its reproduction in the United States.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} Patrick Carnegy, \textit{Wagner and the Art of the Theatre} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 122.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Boston Globe}, 16 Apr 1877, 5.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{New York Times}, 4 Mar 1877, 7. Similarly, the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} noted: “In the partial darkening of the Academy, and in the heralding outside at the beginning of the acts, copy is made of the Bayreuth style of doing things”; 18 Mar 1877, 2. See also \textit{New York Times}, 3 Apr 1877, 4.
\textsuperscript{25} Program booklet, “The Wagner Opera Festival,” 1.
Fryer’s declaration that Wagner had personally bestowed Neuendorff with exclusive directions for the American premiere of *Die Walküre* was subsequently propagated in other newspapers, as well as the assertion that the conductor had been involved in the cycle’s premiere. There was probably very little truth to these claims. While Neuendorff had witnessed and wrote reviews about the Bayreuth performances, he did not mention in his articles that he had assumed an assistant’s role nor did he openly admit that he had any direct link to Wagner (unlike Leopold Damrosch, who publicly acknowledged his friendship with the composer). Moreover, there is no indication in Wagner’s existing correspondence or in Cosima Wagner’s diaries to corroborate that composer and conductor even had contact with one another. Fryer’s statement thus appears to have been nothing other than puffery used to further legitimize the so-called authenticity of his production, and to validate the credibility of his chosen conductor.

For his part, Neuendorff was no doubt aware that he had a challenging task ahead of him. He was going to conduct a work that was acknowledged as part of the pinnacle of Wagner’s artistic career and that, in the view of many, had achieved a high standard of musical execution when the *Ring* was first performed at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival. Compared to his contemporaries Thomas and Damrosch, Neuendorff’s ability as a conductor was less established but he was selected by Fryer probably because of his experience directing German opera and in particular, staged performances of Wagner’s works. Since emigrating from Hamburg to New York in 1855 at the age of twelve, Neuendorff had become a well-known figure in the city’s *Kleindeutschland* community. He had an early career as a timpanist and violinist in the first Stadttheater orchestra under Karl Anschütz, who later groomed the young Adolf to conduct German opera. In 1865 Neuendorff toured with Anschütz and Leonard Grover’s German Grand Opera Company, bringing German-language productions, including one of

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26 For example, the correspondents for the *Christian Advocate* (1 Mar 1877, 9) and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (25 Mar 1877, 16) wrote that Neuendorff had “received copies of the score for *Die Walküre,* together with special instructions as to its reproduction in America, from Wagner himself.”

27 For further details on Neuendorff’s life and career, see especially John Koegel’s *Music in German Immigrant Theater, New York City, 1840–1940* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 54–73.
Tannhäuser, to various American cities. Two years later, he assumed Anschütz’s position of music director at the Neues Stadttheater, eventually becoming its co-manager with the German-born impresario Carl Rosa in 1871.²⁸ That same year, Neuendorff conducted there the American premiere of Lohengrin. Following the theatre’s closure in 1872, he formed his own company at the Germania Theatre near Tammany Hall on Union Square. Under his management and directorship, the Germania became the principal destination for German-language theatre and operetta in New York during the 1870s.²⁹

Meanwhile, Neuendorff was also making a name for himself next door at the Academy of Music, as a champion of the German-language opera repertory, including Wagner’s works. In 1875, he directed there a production of Lohengrin for which, though the performances lacked sophistication and polish, he and his artists were commended for their efforts in bringing the opera to that stage. Neuendorff’s advocacy of Wagner extended to his detailed accounts of the 1876 Bayreuth Festival for the New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung. Apparently, he volunteered to review the premiere of the Ring cycle because he felt compelled to defend Wagner and his latest work against their detractors. In his reports, he stressed the artistic importance of the cycle.³⁰ Even if Fryer did exaggerate the extent of the conductor’s connection to the Bayreuth production, Neuendorff, with his experience and reputation, nevertheless seemed a natural choice for collaboration on this endeavor.

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²⁸ Carl Rosa (1842–89; originally Karl Rose) is best known as the founder of the Carl Rosa Opera Company, a distinguished troupe that toured England and America, presenting Italian operas in English. Rosa lived in New York between 1867 and 1872, and helped Neuendorff to manage the Neues Stadttheater, in addition to conducting the Parepa Rosa Opera Company he founded with his wife, the soprano Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa. Although he returned to England after the Neues Stadttheater closed in 1872, Rosa tried to entice Wagner to the United States in June 1877. See CWD 1, 969.

²⁹ Neuendorff’s company performed at the Germania Theatre until 1881 and then relocated to Old Wallack’s Theatre until 1883. Their repertory consisted primarily of comedies, folk plays, and sometimes, operettas; large-scale grand opera productions were not given at the Germania due to its relatively small size. See entry for the “Germania Theatre Company,” in Cambridge Guide to American Theatre, 2nd ed., ed. Don B. Wilmeth, with Tice L. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Neuendorff’s activities at the Germania Theatre are discussed in depth in Koegel, Music in German Immigrant Theater, 55–66.

³⁰ Koegel, Music in German Immigrant Theater, 67–68; see also Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Neuendorff was otherwise not the paper’s main music critic or a regular contributor, and it is not known whether the Staats-Zeitung would have sent a reporter to Bayreuth if he had not requested the opportunity for himself.
The American premiere of *Die Walküre* was given on April 2 to an “immense” audience that packed the Academy’s 4,500-seat space. This throng of onlookers was variously described by the New York critics as deeply interested, “critical”, and intensely curious. Although there was no specific commentary about the demographic composition of the audience (nor are there extant ticket revenue records from which such a profile could be constructed), it could be surmised that “everyone” was there, including the social elite that frequented the Academy but probably also a very large contingent of the middle-class, likely dominated by German-Americans, which the low ticket prices were bound to attract. As a measure of public interest in the work, the performance counted as a huge success.

As an artistic venture, however, the critics’ responses were decidedly mixed. The writers for the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald* thought it was “highly credible”; the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung* found the production to be enthusiastic but imperfect; the *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported that it was only “partially successful”. The *New York Sun*, on the other hand, found the overall performance to be quite inadequate and its critic chastised Fryer for attempting to stage *Die Walküre* in this way with the memory of the Bayreuth Festival still so fresh.\(^\text{31}\) To an extent, these discrepancies in opinion can be accounted for by the awkward position in which the critics found themselves when they wrote their reviews. In some cases these journalists were not the same ones who went to Bayreuth in 1876. As if seeing and hearing the opera for the first time, the writers for the *Times*, *Staats-Zeitung*, and *Herald* focused on assessing the content of the opera itself and providing detailed exegeses of the plot and music for their readers. Other critics were more concerned with evaluating the quality of the performance, commenting on the orchestra, singers, and scenery, as well as the integration of theatrical and musical elements. These differing approaches highlight the challenge of coming to terms with a work about which much was known but so little had been concretely experienced in America.

\(^{31}\) See *New York Times*, 3 Apr 1877, 4; *New York Herald*, 3 Apr 1877, 3; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 4 Apr 1877, col. C; *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 3 Apr 1877, 5; and *New York Sun*, 5 Apr 1877, 4.
There was still the looming question of whether the operas of the *Ring* could succeed outside of the Bayreuth context.

In this first American staging, *Die Walküre* was performed in its entirety, without omission of roles or cuts.\(^{32}\) Many of the comments about the opera’s music were similar to the impressions relayed across the Atlantic from the cycle’s premiere at Bayreuth, and do not require repeating in detail here. Dramatically, the work had its undeniable high points. Typically, the following scenes were cited as the most effective: in Act I, the first meeting of Sieglinde and Siegmund, and later their “love duet”; in Act II, the dialogue between Wotan and Brünnhilde following Fricka’s departure (Scene 2) and Brünnhilde’s annunciation of death (Scene 4); and in Act III, the opening “Ride of the Valkyries”, and the opera’s conclusion, Wotan’s farewell to Brünnhilde, followed by the “fire music.” The critic of the *Herald* found the parts that were already familiar to him through concert excerpts a fresh revelation when experienced in “their proper surrounding of scenery and dramatic action.” In particular, the “Ride of the Valkyries,” normally performed in an arrangement solely for orchestra, took on an “entirely new color from the introduction of voices.”

By this time, the Wagnerian aesthetic of “continuous melody” and the lack of clear musical numbers were no longer novelties that critics felt required explanation, although one commentator stressed that these elements of the composer’s style had reached their full maturation in *Die Walküre*. Even if these aspects make the opera seem tedious to “uncultured ears”, he noted, this work nevertheless shows a significant advancement—i.e. a “truly modern path”—from Wagner’s earlier works, an evolution that can be tangibly experienced if one attended the near-chronological presentation of the composer’s operas at the Fryer-Neuendorff Festival. Only a couple of journalists openly doubted the ineffectiveness of Wagner’s aesthetic theories as exemplified in *Die Walküre*, such as the correspondent for the *New York Sun*, who

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\(^{32}\) It should be noted that American critics usually indicated in their reviews when a work had been shortened, and in this case, there was no mention that cuts were employed. According to the *New York Tribune*, “The curtain rose at ten minutes before 8, and fell precisely at 12”, thus suggesting a complete performance.
cited all of Hanslick’s criticisms of the Bayreuth performance, professing that he was in agreement with the Viennese critic’s assessments.

Mostly, the New York critics were interested in evaluating the quality of this first American staging of Die Walküre. Their reviews indicate that their opinions ranged greatly on aspects of musical execution and staging, but in general, they clearly felt that the performance was hardly ideal and not to “Bayreuth standards”. Among the cast, the quality of the performances was quite variable. One of the few outstanding performances was that of Viennese soprano Eugenie Pappenheim as Brünnhilde. Although she was but twenty-eight years old, she proved to be an excellent interpreter of the role and was admired for her musical and acting capabilities. The American papers deemed Pappenheim’s voice “excellent” and it was said that her portrayal “as a dramatic and lyric effort were very happily balanced.” Pauline Canissa’s Sieglinde was also praised for being “conscientious and forcible,” especially in the first act duet with A. Bischoff as Siegmund. The New York Herald even found her performance “astonishing,” since it was a departure from the supporting roles she usually sang in Italian operas, for which she became quite popular in the 1850s and 60s.

The rest of the singers were comparatively weak; their performances suffered primarily from poor intonation or awkward acting. Some critics were more forgiving than others. While according to the Herald, Felix Preusser as Wotan was “apparently tired and sang as he usually sings—out of tune”, the Times stated that he “filled the role with appropriate dignity.” Blum’s Hunding was “excellent”, according to the Boston Advertiser, since he did “all that could be done” (Times). A. Bischoff’s Siegmund and Mme. Listner’s Fricka were passable except for a general clumsiness in their stage movements. The latter’s weak acting skills though, did not help to enliven her long dialogue with Preusser’s Wotan at the beginning of Act II, thus exacerbating the impression of tediousness for which that scene was often criticized. Significant disappointment was expressed regarding the eight Valkyries, who appeared to have struggled
with their parts. In the opinion of the *Times*’s critic, the women “were hardly equal to their duties yesterday, and the effect of their grand scene was more than once destroyed by uncommonly wide departures from correct intonation.” The *Tribune* writer agreed, stating bluntly that they were “so bad that they were laughed at.” Only the *Herald*’s review was more merciful, pointing out that the singers at least “deserve credit for getting through the most difficult music of the opera in a manner which was more than respectable. Only once was there really a miss, and more than once extremely difficult pieces were well sung.”

Concerning the orchestra, the New York critics acknowledged the ensemble and conductor Neuendorff for their efforts. The commentary in the *Times* was especially positive:

> For four hours the spirit of Mr. Neuendorff’s forces never flagged, and the precision of their execution never faltered. Even the brass instruments were equal to the share of the common task, and their vigorous accents, an emphasis, mainly, of the passages suggestive of Walhalla and of Hunding, were never once out of tune. To acknowledge that the work of the band was so good, is to affirm with renewed force the excellence of the presentation.

The critic of the *Tribune*, however, seemed more perceptive—or honest—in his assessment. Although he thought the ensemble performed to a higher standard than any that had previously played at the Academy, the group’s interpretation lacked the finesse and nuance to effectively fulfill the orchestra’s integral role in the unfolding drama of *Die Walküre*. As he wrote:

> [T]he orchestra which Wagner demands for his “Ring of the Nibelungs” is peculiar. The instrumental part of the opera is quite eloquent and expressive as the vocal part, and very often it is more important than what is sung; it is a perfect symphony. Now we miss the suggestiveness and variety that we should have found in the orchestra; it was rough and loud in the brass and weak in the strings, and rarely gave us any delicacy of coloring.

In part, this shortcoming was due to the small scope of Neuendorff’s ensemble; at just under sixty musicians, it was only half the size of the original Bayreuth orchestra. Evidently, the lack of sufficient strings contributed to the perceived imbalance between them and the coarse-sounding brass. Surely the problem was worsened by the orchestra’s placement in the auditorium, that is, in the demarcated section at the front of the stage rather than in a sunken pit, which the
Academy of Music did not have. By contrast, in the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus*, the brass instruments are placed on the lowest levels of the covered, sunken pit, while the strings are positioned higher, closer to the stage level.

One factor that clearly contributed to some of the deficiencies in the first American performance of *Die Walküre* was that the singers and orchestra had insufficient rehearsal time. Given that most—if not all—of them had practically no prior experience with the opera’s music (none of the singers had sung the same roles elsewhere), they would have required an extensive period of preparation. As we know, Wagner’s own singers and orchestra undertook an uncommonly rigorous rehearsal schedule during the summers of 1875 and 1876 to prepare for the Bayreuth Festival. Unfortunately, because of ignorance and lack of experience producing Wagner’s operas, and/or perhaps a shortage of funds for adequate rehearsals, Fryer underestimated how much work was actually required. Already from the start of the New York Festival, it became clear that he had been naïve in expecting his company to handle the demanding schedule of performances he had set as well as sufficiently prepare, in a very short amount of time, a new and difficult work such as *Die Walküre*. When Fryer initially recognized this problem, he was forced to defer the premieres of the opera to later dates in both New York (from March 23 to April 2) and Boston (from March 30 to April 16). Most of the American critics were not surprised by the delay; indeed, the correspondent for the *New York Tribune* was relieved that “the manager has resolved not to tempt disaster by giving so serious a work as the ‘Walküre’ until his people are quite ready to do it as well as they know how.” Yet in the end, these schedule changes did not do anything to alleviate the company’s burden. In fact, the new arrangement probably taxed them more, since the New York debut of *Die Walküre* took place immediately after the first week of the Wagner Festival in Boston. As the *Herald’s* critic

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33 A sunken orchestra pit was a rare feature in American theatres in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. At this time, only Booth’s Theatre, which opened in 1869 in New York, had one. See entry for “Booth’s Theatre” in The Cambridge Guide to American Theatre, 119.

revealed, following the Boston performance of *Lohengrin* on March 31, the company traveled overnight back to New York. The very next day, they undertook a seven-hour rehearsal for *Die Walküre*, followed by a three-hour rehearsal on April 2 in preparation for the premiere that evening. With such demands and a severely limited rehearsal period, it was inevitable that the performance would display noticeable defects.

There was limited critical commentary about the stage scenery and costumes, but concerning the execution of these aspects, responses were equally mixed. The critics of the *New York Herald* and the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung* wrote that they expected liberties to be taken when the original Bayreuth scenery was adapted to the parameters of the Academy’s stage. More interesting to them was the fact that the sets and costumes were brand new, and thus were not created from existing stock, as was the norm with productions at the Academy. Fryer’s significant investment, to this end, was not lost on the *Times*’ critic:

> For the first time in many years, the frequenters of the house were gladdened with the sight of an opera produced with brand new scenery. Thanks to Mr. Fryer’s liberality, the action of “Die Walküre” progresses in front of three fresh “sets,” [sic] all fresh and painted from sketches taken at Bayreuth. [...] In brief, the mise-en-scène of the opera has been looked to—a very rare thing, as the habitués of the Academy must concede.

Generally, the overall quality of the sets was deemed fairly respectable, although certain stage effects, which already had a questionable measure of success in Bayreuth, proved similarly, if not more, problematic during the New York premiere. To portray the riding Valkyries at the beginning of Act III, Fryer’s troupe employed Carl Doeppler’s technique of projecting painted images on glass slides through a “magic lantern” (or stereopticon); according to the reporter for the *New York Herald*, it was not effective. The use of a live horse for Grane proved to be a huge distraction, for it “occasioned much amusement by neighing and making horse-faces and laughs at the audience.” As for the costumes, the expression of some kind of quasi-mythical-historical accuracy seemed to be the qualifying standard. The *Tribune*’s writer appreciated their “picturesque” qualities, regarding them as “correct”, although what exactly he

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35 *New York Herald, 3 Apr 1877, 3.*
meant by this he did not explain. But not all details in the stage dress were flawless. The Herald’s critic was distracted by the shoes that Bischoff wore for Siegmund, and stated that: “old Norsemen did not wear sandals with high heels to them—in fact, history has never made mention of so remarkable a foot covering as being in use among any people except stage people.” While the sarcastic tone of the journalist’s comment is unmistakable, his observation nevertheless suggests he supported Wagner’s vision that the proper stage dress was fundamental in creating a convincing illusion of a mythic past.

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Two weeks after the New York Festival, Fryer took his production of Die Walküre to the Boston Theatre, giving the opera its debut in that city on April 16, with a repeat performance on the 18th. The details of these presentations and their critical reception are worth considering at length because of the clear differences in response between New York and Boston audiences and their respective journalists. While New York reviewers seemed more concerned with the quality of the performance given of the opera, Bostonian commentators preferred to debate the aesthetics of the work. In Boston as well, articles in that city’s newspapers reveal an intense skepticism about the composer and the viability of his most recent work that was much less evident in New York. This skepticism might explain why there were much smaller audiences that attended the Boston performances of Die Walküre than at the opera’s American premiere in New York City.

The Boston Premiere of Die Walküre: Performance and Reception

Judging from the reactions of the Boston press, it appears that the debut of Die Walküre in that city was similar in quality to the opera’s first presentation in New York. As at the

36 These presentations in Boston are not included in the list of Wagnerian performances recently compiled by Ulrike Thiele as “Übersicht: Wagners Werke auf den Bühnen seiner Zeit,” in Wagner Handbuch, edited by Laurenz Lütteken (Kassel: Bärenreiter/Metzler, 2012), 422–25.

37 The Boston reviews examined include: the Boston Daily Advertiser, 17 Apr 1877; Boston Globe, 17 Apr 1877;
Academy of Music, the complete opera appeared to have been given at the Boston Theatre, possibly without cuts. Most critics agreed that Fryer’s production was well below the assumed Bayreuth standard, but they remained somewhat gracious towards the company, commending their valiant, if imperfect, efforts. In the view of the *Boston Journal*’s correspondent,

[Die Walküre] was performed in a much better manner than there was reason to expect...[A]lthough the results of the experiment may be far behind the achievements at Bayreuth, it is something quite remarkable and the management, as well as the artists, are deserving of high praise and liberal encouragement.

The reviewer for the *Daily Advertiser* thought that at the very least, the performance was sufficient “to give any listener who has been blest with a particle of analytic power some idea of the scope and purpose of Wagner’s latest style of music.”

Concerning Fryer’s singers and Neuendorff’s orchestra, the Boston commentary was also comparable to the New York reviews. Pappenheim was praised as the best singer and actor in the entire cast, followed by Blum as Hunding. The others, notably Bischoff as Siegmund, Canissa as Sieglinde, and Preusser as Wotan, however, were variously criticized for stiff acting, lack of stage presence, and poor intonation and voice quality. The Valkyries had not significantly improved since New York, although they were somewhat absolved by the difficulty of the music they had to sing; as the *Globe* reported: “Of the Walkyres the less said is perhaps easiest. They sang some very trying music, and sang some music very tryingly. They sang other music better, but as a whole they only half performed an almost thankless task.” The critics found no major faults with the orchestra, which they generally commended for their “excellent” playing under the “sure and vigorous lead” of Neuendorff. No mention was made of

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*Boston Evening Gazette*, 21 Apr 1877; *Boston Journal*, 17 Apr 1877; *Sunday Courier*, 22 Apr 1877; all are reprinted in DJM 37, no. 2 (28 Apr 1877):12–14. Dwight’s own review appears on pp. 14–15. The second performance of *Die Walküre* on 18 April was not reviewed, except for a brief article that appeared in the *Boston Globe* the following day, which stated that “the results were much the same as on Monday night.”

The only evidence to the contrary is that reported in the *Boston Journal*, whose critic observed that “The opera has been curtailed considerably since its production in New York, and the second act, like the first, is by this means brought within the compass of about an hour. The last act...is a trifle longer.” However, no details were given regarding what was excised, and the *Journal* was the only Boston paper to mention the issue.
acoustic imbalance or the underwhelming size of the ensemble even though it too performed at
the front of the stage; the Boston Theatre, like the Academy of Music, lacked a sunken pit.

Visually, the adapted New York scenery appeared to have translated on the stage of the
Boston Theatre without creating any serious problems. The Daily Advertiser and Journal
reported that the “magic lantern” effects for the “Ride of the Valkyries” were “well enough”, the
scenery “appropriate”, and costumes “quite elegant.” The writer for the Globe was in basic
agreement with his colleagues, mentioning that the “clouds, fire, etc.” were “well-managed”, yet
he felt their effectiveness would have been much greater if the light in the auditorium had been
lowered as it was at Bayreuth. Only John Sullivan Dwight, in his review for his Journal of Music,
thought the stage elements, on which he felt much of the appeal of this opera relied, were
especially wanting, a curious assessment, perhaps, because he had not seen any other fully-
staged performances of the Ring operas to provide him with a comparison.

On the aesthetic merits of the opera itself, Bostonian reviewers were more opinionated
and critical. Among them, both the correspondents for the Globe and Evening Gazette
expressed strong negative reactions. While they admitted it was their first hearing of a work
which was not performed entirely adequately, they reacted against Die Walküre as the fullest
and most mature expression of Wagner’s theoretical ideas. In their published responses, they
touched on several core themes, notably, the inaccessibility of the music (as a result of
formlessness, lack of identifiable melodies, and discordant harmonies) and the opera’s
overreliance on extra-musical effects. While these criticisms were not new to the general
discourse about Wagner’s music, in this context, they encapsulate a Bostonian skepticism and
reticence about the composer’s Ring operas that was relatively absent in New York. Such
comments were reminiscent of past reproaches of Wagner’s earlier works, which were now,
curiously enough, receiving praise compared to Die Walküre. The Globe’s writer favored
Lohengrin over the latter as best exemplifying Wagner’s use of “recurring themes”. And while he
found that the orchestral score to the Ring opera was “splendid, with almost incomparable
mastery of instrumentation”, for the most part, it had been given over to “the production of weird and discordant effects…or at least intellectually unmelodious.”

More derisive was the critic for the Evening Gazette, who described the music of Die Walküre (with the exception of the love duet in Act I) as “rampant jargon”, and as “hideous, brutal, uninteresting, and extravagant.” He also felt that any attempt to understand it was futile, and complained that too much labor was involved in uncovering “the minute meanings” of the music, the end result of which provided little satisfaction to him. Occasionally, he did find “superb orchestral and harmonic effects”, but the entire result remained “incomprehensible gibberish, a mad jangling of tones, a pompous burlesque upon all that is grand and pure in true art.” That the music required extra-musical effects for its particular denotation, in his view, demonstrated its weakness: “we set little value upon that music which needs either such adjuncts [as scenic display] or a running commentary descriptive of the composer’s meaning.” On this he appeared to agree with Hanslick whose criticisms of the Ring were by then well-known to Bostonians through Dwight’s Journal of Music.

These aspects of Die Walküre deemed disturbing and perplexing by the Evening Gazette’s critic and other Boston reporters were part of their broader critique that the music of the mature Wagner was too extreme, and verging on degeneracy. The writer for the Globe admitted to feeling “sad and confused” by the opera, sensing that the composer had gone beyond acceptable limits and had “drifted into irredeemable radicalism, without hope of compromise or reclaim, that [Wagner] rather disgusts sober-minded men, as a specimen of what one’s enthusiasm may do when uncurbed.” Beethoven’s Fidelio, he thought, was a “blissful relief” in contrast to “the bombast, the noise, the feverish unquiet, the struggling for bizarre originality, [and] the sentimentalism” of Die Walküre. Similarly, the Gazette’s correspondent complained that in Die Walküre, Wagner had taken German opera down a path of excess, greatly distorting what once was “good” about the genre. As an example, the critic cited the “Ride of the Valkyries”, which he believed Wagner had modeled on Carl Maria von
Weber's evocation of the supernatural in *Der Freischütz*, but carried here to "extravagant grotesqueness." In this, he was perhaps thinking of Weber's use of the diminished seventh chord to evoke the evil Samiel, which to him, seemed more palatable than the augmented triad outlined in the Valkyrie cry, "Hojotoho!", and its piquant sonority used throughout the "Ride". The poor intonation of the singers in performance probably did not help to improve his impression.

Such criticisms were further echoed in the response of Boston's best-known Wagner skeptic: John Sullivan Dwight. Having previously been unable to attend the Bayreuth Festival, the premiere of *Die Walküre* was the first time Dwight saw an opera from the *Ring* staged in its entirety. Despite much that he found "adequate and brilliant" (in his opinion, "Wotan's Farewell" and the "Fire music" were the best parts of the entire work), Dwight identified no less than nine key problems he had with the opera itself, mostly the features that exemplified the composer's aesthetic theories. In his opinion:

1) The mythological basis for *Die Walküre*’s plot is not a stimulating topic for the operatic stage; human tragedy (e.g. the story of Siegmund and Sieglinde) would be far more appealing to the audience.

2) The subordination of music to the poetry is problematic; in uniting music and poetry, music's independence is subverted.

3) Wagner's use of "recitative" or "endless melody" for the vocal parts is fatal to the enjoyment of the audience; no amount of "culture", "musical knowledge", or "special study" will improve it.

4) Wagner's musical ideas are fragments that do not appear to lead anywhere (i.e. develop in musical terms). Furthermore,

5) These fragments, i.e. the "leading motives", have reduced the music to "simply labels, tags and badges". The feeling is that these motives seem musically irrelevant in the context in which they appear: "listening musically, you cannot feel that they have any right there; for they do not develop, they are only skillfully forced in."

6) The opera exhibits a troubling lack of "repose", a constant and continuous restlessness which causes the "listening sense" to be "dragged on by sheer tyranny of verbal text."

7) The orchestral effects, while often voluminous and rich are also "hard, discordant, crushing, colorless, empty, and ugly." The result of this being,

8) An overall feeling of "cacophony" and a sense of incoherence, the effect of the opera being "bric-a-brac", "piecemeal", a "heterogeneous collection of bright things."

9) The opera suffers from an over-dependence on complex scenic effects in order to make it seem effectively dramatic. Moreover, these visual effects serve to distract the viewer-listener from the apparent paucity in the development of the musical ideas within the artwork itself.

These "faults" of *Die Walküre* Dwight attributed to Wagner seeking to over-revolutionize
the operatic genre, and he accused the composer for being self-indulgent in attempting to do so. (By comparison, Dwight’s beloved idol Beethoven “was content to do as others do, but do it in his own way and do it better. Real creative genius does not need to quarrel with the past, to break the forms, to shift the arena, in order to show itself original.”) Moreover, his criticisms fall in line with the view that advanced Wagnerian opera exhibited stylistic features that might be defined as “decadent.” As Stephen Downes has argued in his study, *Music and Decadence*, these aspects can be variously described as “miniaturism, fragmentation, hysterical hyperbole, sensuality, ornament, degenerate ugliness”, aesthetic categories into which Dwight’s points above can be easily placed.\(^{39}\) While American advocates of Wagner largely ignored the concept of “decadence” as a positive feature of his operas (unlike many of their European counterparts), to Dwight and others who shared his view, Wagner’s “decadent” style was clearly antithetical to their notion of what constituted “good” music. In other words, this music, as Downes puts it, lacks “the control, moral restraint, civility, and ideas of beauty and seemliness that were associated with what self-appointed arbiters of cultural worthiness deemed to be ‘good taste’.”\(^{40}\)

A substantial part of the Boston public also seemed to feel the same way, for the relatively small audiences at these performances (compared to New York) suggest there was a general public reticence about *Die Walküre*. The city’s papers initially anticipated a packed auditorium for the opera’s Boston debut, but in the end, the actual totals did not remotely equal the crowds that were reported at New York’s Academy of Music. According to the Boston Theatre box office receipts (transcribed below in Figure 3.2), 801 tickets were sold for the first performance on Monday, April 16, and 1,053 tickets for the second performance on April 18.\(^{41}\)

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41 Boston Theatre (Washington Street, Boston, Mass.) Box Office Receipts (MS Thr 520), Volume 16, at Houghton
Figure 3.2. Boston Theatre box office receipts for *Die Walküre* performed by the Fryer-Neuendorff Company in April 1877.

a. *Die Walküre* – Monday, April 16, 1877; Weather: Fair

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boxes</th>
<th>Admissions</th>
<th>@ $1.00</th>
<th>$146.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
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<td>@ $1.00</td>
<td>$146.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>@ $2.50</td>
<td>$347.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parquette Circle</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>@ $2.00</td>
<td>$166.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress Circle</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>@ $1.50</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balcony</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>@ $2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Circle</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>@ $1.00</td>
<td>$147.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallery</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>@ $0.50</td>
<td>$23.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>@ $1.50</td>
<td>$1,079.00 [less $21.50 (subscription) = $1,058.00 ]</td>
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</table>

b. *Die Walküre* – Wednesday, April 18, 1877; Weather: Fair

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Admissions</td>
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<td>@ $1.00</td>
<td>$155.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>@ $2.50</td>
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<td>Parquette Circle</td>
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<td>@ $1.50</td>
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<td>Balcony</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>@ $2.00</td>
<td>$408.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Circle</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>@ $1.00</td>
<td>$130.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallery</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>@ $0.50</td>
<td>$23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock</td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>@ $1.50</td>
<td>$1,547.00 [less $20.50 (subscription) = $1,527.00 ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a possibility that some tickets and/or patrons were unaccounted for; nevertheless, these totals indicate that the nearly 3,200-seat capacity of the Boston Theatre was just under, or about, a third full for both performances. The figures above corroborate the observations of the Boston critics, who all seemed surprised by the relatively undersized audiences because Fryer’s first Wagner Opera Festival, held earlier during the final week in March, had drawn much higher attendance numbers. According to his review, Dwight commented that the Boston Theatre was “more than crowded” for the five nights that *Tannhäuser, Lohengrin*, and *Der fliegende Holländer* were performed.\(^42\) All together, they were a box office success, with a single performance of *Lohengrin* earning the most out of any

\(^42\) DJM 37, no. 1 (14 Apr 1877): 6.
dramatic performance at the theatre that year. By comparison, the April 18 presentation of Die Walküre was the highest grossing performance of the Second Wagner Opera Festival, but its receipts were just under half of the earlier Lohengrin performance.43

The critics were puzzled as well that there was not more Bostonian enthusiasm for Die Walküre since during the week between the two Festivals, an English version of Emanuel von Geibel’s 1858 play Brunhild was staged for six successive performances (April 9–14). It starred the Czech actress, Francesca Romana Magdalena, otherwise known as Fanny Janauschek. The receipts for this week show that there was increasing interest in the play during its run, with revenue only at $328 for the first performance, but peaking at $1,296 near the end. The late-nineteenth-century commentator Carl Ahrendt believed, however, that it was Wagner’s Ring that influenced audiences’ interest in the play, and not vice versa.44 Otherwise, there appears to be no clear reason as to why attendance dwindled for the Second Festival, especially for the local premiere of an opera drawn from Wagner’s most significant work. One possible explanation is that Boston had a much smaller German-American population compared to New York, and consequently, there were fewer interested in seeing opera in the German-language. Another reason could be that Bostonians might have already traveled to New York to see the production

43 The Boston Theatre box office receipts show that for the first Wagner Opera Festival, Lohengrin earned nearly $3,200, followed by Tannhäuser ($2,337), the double-bill of “Tone Pictures from Die Walküre and Die fliegende Holländer” ($2,224), and the single performance of Holländer ($1,849). For the Second Wagner Opera Festival, Die Walküre (on 18 Apr) earned $1,547, followed by Lohengrin ($1,237), and Fidelio ($1,169). Despite the differences, both of Fryer’s Wagner Festivals achieved remarkable profits for that season compared to other dramatic performances at the Boston Theatre, where most performances had receipts under $1,000.

44 A discussion of Geibel’s play along with reviews of the American performances reprinted from several Boston papers were compiled by Carl Ahrendt in a pamphlet entitled The Song of the Nibelungen. Brunhild: An Analytic Sketch (New York: Munroe and Metz, 1877.) Geibel (1815–1884) was a well-known poet and playwright from Lübeck, and Wagner himself had read Brunhild. However, according to Cosima’s diary, Wagner disparaged Geibel’s portrayal of the Valkyrie, finding it pitifully hilarious on several occasions. As she recorded on 25 August 1872:
We have to laugh heartily at scenes in Geibel’s Brünhilde, which R. is now reading—typical of the academician and classicist, who, despising all side issues, has taken just the heroine by herself, in order to create a play like Medea, Sappho, Phèdre, etc.; while Hebbel is a romantic—but both so flat and pitiful that one is amazed, not about them, but about the people who tolerate and even praise their work.

Five years later, she wrote on 10 October 1877: “...our talk leads us to the Nibelungen of Geibel and of Hebbel, R. reads some passages from them amid great hilarity, and we find it hard to overcome our amazement that such products are not banished with scorn and contumely from the realms of German literature.”
earlier in the month; or perhaps they stayed away from the Boston performances after learning about the mixed reviews concerning the New York presentations. Only John Sullivan Dwight seemed sure that the main problem was the failure of Die Walküre to truly interest Bostonians, despite the shortcomings of the production. With the exception of a “very few admirers…a few more who were curiously interested, and a few who stand systematically committed to the innovation on the score of progress,” he opined, “never have we sat in an intelligent assembly which appeared more puzzled, bored, and wearied out by great length (four hours), as well as by the strangeness, heaviness, and dullness alike of the [opera’s] dramatic characters and plot, the music, and much of the performance.”

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Based on the New York and Boston reviews, one can conclude that the first American presentations of Die Walküre by the Fryer-Neuendorff troupe were uneven, even seriously flawed. Certainly Fryer’s inadequate production revealed some of the primary concerns of presenting the Ring cycle in the United States, notably, the artistic and financial challenges of bringing the opera to the stage. While the sets and stage effects were copied from the 1876 Bayreuth production, they had to be adapted for the stages at the Academy of Music and the Boston Theatre. Limitations in this vein inevitably made it difficult for the production to achieve the desired fidelity to the original (as far the troupe thought this was a goal worth achieving). It also became evident that an adequate performance of this particularly advanced Wagnerian work required serious preparation of the staging and music together, more than was normally expected for nineteenth-century opera companies. Given the schedule Fryer had arranged for the Festival, he had naively assumed that the production would be relatively easy to assemble, and had underestimated the amount of rehearsal time required by his company. He also overestimated the abilities of the singers he had casted, who appeared to have little prior experience performing Wagnerian opera, and none performing a work with as technically

45 DJM 37, no. 2 (28 Apr 1877): 14.
demanding roles as in *Die Walküre*. The appropriate guidance on singing and gesture was found wanting; most of Fryer’s singers (with perhaps the exception of Pappenheim) struggled with naturalistic acting of their roles. It seems that the conductor Neuendorff did not intervene in this respect, nor did he display full mastery of the aesthetic demands of the music. Walter Damrosch claimed the “ignorance of the music of Wagner on the part of the conductor had…prevented this performance from making any impression or giving any real idea of the beauty of the work.” In sum, this production reflected many of the problems that deeply concerned Wagner regarding the replication of the *Ring* operas outside of the Bayreuth milieu he had established.

In spite of these deficiencies, the first American presentations of *Die Walküre* were still regarded as a major milestone within their particular context. The correspondent for the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* boasted of his city as being at the forefront of art music culture in staging this part of the *Ring*, in his view the “culmination point” of Wagner’s entire output, in advance of cities like London and Paris. In New York, it was significant that the U.S. premiere of the opera took place at the Academy of Music. By mounting *Die Walküre* for the first time (in the original German) at this recognizably elite institution, Fryer stood to give the *Ring* its first real entrée into American culture, promoting consciousness of the composer’s cycle that went beyond the Bayreuth premiere. While the Academy was presumably selected for its large stage and ample technological resources (Neuendorff’s Germania Theatre next door would have been too small), there were also social consequences for having the opera performed at this venue. The Academy of Music was long known as a social haven for the city’s moneyed elites, even though it also attracted a fairly large and diverse segment of the New York population. That the first performance of one of Wagner’s most aesthetically advanced works occurred there was viewed by some critics as creating a desirable shift in opera-going behavior practices. They felt perhaps

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46 Damrosch, *A Musical Life*, 55. Damrosch's father, Leopold, would conduct the Metropolitan Opera premiere of *Die Walküre* in 1885.
that the event could help elevate the social purpose of opera, that is, from being regarded as merely a fashionable or diverting entertainment, to a serious art form that demanded focused attention and appreciation. The New York Times reporter, for example, appeared to be encouraging this new level of concentration, and had stressed that Die Walküre could only be properly understood through thoughtful listening and the total absorption that was demanded of this process:

The music accompanying it reveals to the attentive listener rare beauties. It should be said, once for all, that these beauties are only perceptible to the attentive listener, and that many of them, indeed, require a certain amount of preparation for their appreciation. [...] It must be conceded that even the most melodious and best defined passages exact several hearings for their thorough comprehension. In other words, an opera like “Die Walküre” is not a work which can be enjoyed after the fashion approved by occupants of private boxes, who occasionally interrupt a conversation to lend an ear to an aria by the prima donna.

He also claimed that the reward for the “student of the [Ring’s] libretto and score” will be an “endless vista of delight”, and that even the “merely sensuous but not unwatchful dilettante” will be “excited with a force seldom experienced.” In other words, sincere engagement with this Wagner opera was deemed to be intellectually and emotionally stimulating, thus, an appropriate medium for self-cultivation and social progress.

In Boston the fervor of the skeptical critics, especially Dwight, tended to overshadow the few who were inclined to defend Die Walküre. Those in the latter group though seemed tentatively hopeful about the opera’s future in the United States. The correspondent for the Daily Advertiser left it up to his readers to assess for themselves the ultimate “worth and beauty and probable longevity of the new style of operatic composition.” The journalist of the Boston Traveller believed the opera would undergo the same process of acceptance as Wagner’s earlier works, given time for acclimatization:

It would be presumption to pretend to grasp the entirety of such a work as Wagner’s “Die Walküre” on a single hearing, or to understand the intention of an opera which is certainly great, which is certainly wonderfully dramatic, and certainly has many scenes which can be enjoyed heartily, when listening to it for the first time. [...] The parts which are not grasped at first, may come in after time—this has been assuredly so in the
composer’s other works—and we may grow to a condition to find all appetizing and profitable.

The most outspoken of the Bostonian Wagner supporters was William Foster Apthorp, and it was his perspective that appeared most influential in directing Bostonian reception in favour of Wagner opera over the next several decades. Born in Boston, Apthorp (1848–1913) wrote columns on musical topics for the *Boston Courier*, the *Boston Evening Traveller*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. He became the chief critic of the *Boston Evening Transcript* (in 1881) where he remained until 1903. Apthorp’s progressive opinions about Wagner’s music were emerging during this period as Dwight’s conservative views were on their decline. According to Robert B. Nelson, Apthorp’s writings marked a significant change in the style of Bostonian music criticism, departing from the “dogmatic, authoritative style” of Dwight in pursuit of a more “temperate, objective, personal-opinion style” that would eventually become the norm. Apthorp was also a proponent of contemporary music of his time, providing discussion of new works, while pushing for improved standards of performance and seeking to elevate music appreciation. Highly educated and musically literate, he displayed an astute understanding of musical matters that surpassed many of his counterparts. All these aspects are evident in his review of the first performance of *Die Walküre* for the *Sunday Courier*.

Apthorp stood somewhat apart from his Boston colleagues in his opinion that the many inadequacies of the Fryer-Neuendorff production were to blame for the lukewarm, even negative, reception of the opera’s aesthetic qualities. As he complained:

> I am induced to speak thus strongly, simply from my intense admiration of the Walküre, as a work. It was more than thoughtless and rash, it was lamentably wanting in all due reverence, almost aesthetically criminal, to have attempted performing so great a work as the Walküre, in so new and unaccustomed a style, and hence so liable to be misunderstood, with means so necessarily inadequate.

He was especially critical of the singers, who appeared to have been unaware, or had misunderstood, the relationship between the orchestral score and their movements on stage.

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48 See reprint in DJM 37, no. 2 (28 Apr 1877):13–14.
With the exception of Pappenheim, Apthorp noticed that whenever the others were not singing, they stared “point blank at the conductor…palpably counting their bars.” Evidently, sections of orchestral music had been misconstrued as pauses in the stage action. Seeing an opportunity to educate his readers, he explained to them what should have happened instead:

If the actors have nothing to sing, they must still continue to act, the orchestra accompanying their action the while; their pantomime must be of the most vividly expressive kind, so expressive that the orchestra shall seem only the indispensable accompaniment to it, and not anything to claim particular attention for itself. With Wagner nothing ever happens in the orchestra unless it is justified and conditioned by something happening simultaneously on the stage.

In turn, the spectator must give his/her full attention to the performance in order to grasp these intimate connections between the music and the visual elements. As Apthorp instructed:

…but if the attention is diverted from the stage, the ear hears merely a succession of orchestral phrases which neither are, nor are, intended to be musically interesting per se, but derive their whole interest and reason of being from their intimate connection with the stage itself. [...] It is Wagner’s most explicit wish that the spectator’s attention should never be diverted from the stage.

Apthorp, above all, seemed most concerned that, since many Bostonians were unfamiliar with the advanced aesthetics of Die Walküre, the merits of the opera were actually obscured by the Fryer-Neuendorff company’s poor performance, in which “the real gist of the work, the prominence of the dramatic element, and the cooperation of the music with the acting…was lost.” Sensing perhaps that his readers needed more guidance as to what they should expect in an ideal presentation of the opera, he published an article that appeared in the Atlantic Monthly three months later, in which he once again elaborated on the necessary integration of the music and stage action in Wagnerian drama. “Remember that [in it],” Apthorp wrote, “there are no accessories; the relation between all elements of the drama, between music, singing, acting, scenery, is absolutely functional. No single item can be omitted without affecting the whole.”49 He also advised future conductors and casts of the Ring of their obligations to the composer’s instructions in the score:

Wagner is fond of giving his characters long waits between their sentences in certain scenes; these waits are intended to be filled up by silent dramatic action, which he has for the most part carefully and minutely indicated in the scene, the action being accompanied—or, as he would say, the expression of the action being intensified—by appropriate music in the orchestra. Now unless the actors in such passages follow the stage directions very closely, exactly timing their movements, gestures, changes of facial expression, so that each gesture, look and movement shall fall upon the appropriate orchestral phrase, on the intended harmonic modulation, the peculiar significance of the music, even the common sense of the whole scene, disappears at once.

Apthorp’s point, of course, is obvious to those of us who are familiar with Wagner’s operas and the composer’s principle of Gesamtkunstwerk. But to an audience that was mostly, if not entirely, new to the Ring, and with relatively little direct experience with staged performances of Wagner’s works, his counsel may have proved to be quite enlightening and helpful. Apthorp’s educative approach was indicative of yet another shift in American Wagner criticism, as over the following decade, the views of Dwight and other Wagner skeptics were regarded as outmoded, and gave way to a focus on audience building and musical appreciation for the composer’s operas, particularly the Ring cycle. As for improvements in the quality of productions, it would not be until the Metropolitan Opera premiere of Die Walküre in 1885, considered by some as a more “official” debut, that the performance issues pointed out by Apthorp and others would be tackled afresh.

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Although it may have seemed a singular event in the American context, the 1877 U.S. staging of Die Walküre by the Fryer-Neuendorff company was only one of several productions of the Ring operas that occurred outside of Bayreuth in the period immediately following the cycle’s premiere. Performances of the same opera had already taken place in Vienna in March that year, but this production and the American one were, in a strict sense, “unauthorized”. Curiously, Wagner knew nothing about the American production (there is no indication in his correspondence or in Cosima’s diaries that they were aware of it) but the news of the Viennese performances having occurred without his consent or approval immediately raised for him
urgent questions about the *Ring* cycle’s “afterlife.” With the future of the Bayreuth Festival uncertain, he knew it was unrealistic to preserve the cycle for performance only at the *Festspielhaus*. Moreover, the royalties gained from the release of the work could be put towards paying down the debt he owed to the king. In late April of 1877, he outlined the terms that released the rest of the cycle’s operas to Vienna, and soon after, German impresarios bombarded him with requests to stage them in their own theatres. By March 1878, “Hamburg, Schwerin, Brunswick, Leipzig, Vienna, Munich” were reportedly “all doing the *Ring*.” But it was Angelo Neumann (1838–1910), then the co-director (with August Förster) of the Leipzig Opera, who most affected the dissemination of the *Ring* operas in Europe during this period. After having persuaded Wagner to let him stage the first cycle in Leipzig in 1878, Neumann later facilitated the local premieres of the *Ring* in Berlin (May 1881), and in London (May 1882). He later acquired the rights to present the cycle on a pan-European tour: between September 1882 and June 1883, his “Wandering Wagner Theatre” (*Das Wandernde Wagner-Theater*) gave nearly 135 performances of the cycle and 58 concerts in various cities throughout Germany, Holland, Italy, and Austria.52

Far from simply giving the rights to the *Ring* operas to any theatre impresario who asked him, Wagner imposed strict conditions on these would-be productions. Only when these prerequisites were agreed to be carried out by the director, would the composer consent. The main reason for this, as much of his correspondence and Cosima’s diary entries from this period

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50 CWD 1, 7 Mar 1877, 951.
51 CWD 2, 6 Mar 1878, 34. Due to his contract with King Ludwig, Wagner initially did not have the rights to the cycle and therefore, was not himself authorized to release the *Ring* operas. Writing to Councilor Düfflipp in April, he requested to have the contract annulled, and presumably, to appease the king, he noted that he “has no objection to its performance in Munich.” Later, Wagner formulated the terms for the release of *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* to Vienna, which included 20,000 marks as an advance, and the request for ten percent of the royalties. See CWD 1, 7 Apr and 22 Apr 1877; 957, 960.
52 The details of Neumann’s tour, the quality of performances, and the reception of audiences and critics still await further research. For an overview, see Carnegie’s *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, 123–30. John Barker has recently made some progress on this topic, with his comprehensive examination of the Italian portion of Neumann’s tour, and in particular, the reception of the *Ring* in Venice; see Chapters 11 and 12 in *Wagner and Venice*, Eastman Studies in Music 59 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008). Neumann’s own account of the tour (as well as the *Ring* productions in Leipzig, Berlin, and London) is given in *Erinnerungen an Richard Wagner* (Leipzig, 1907); trans. into English by Edith Livermore as *Personal Recollections of Wagner* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1908).
reveal, was that Wagner wanted to ensure that the performance of his *Ring* operas in ordinary theatres would not dilute the “extraordinariness” of the Bayreuth experience. For one, he tried to ensure that the integrity of the cycle as a complete work was maintained; in several cases, Wagner rejected the requests of German impresarios who wanted to stage only one or two of the *Ring* operas. In his initial negotiations with the composer, Bernhard Pollini of the Stadt-Theater in Hamburg asked for just *Die Walküre*, but Wagner told him that he would only give that opera to directors and managers who agreed to perform the entire cycle. Pollini eventually accepted this condition but informed Wagner that he wanted to start his “cycle” with *Die Walküre* anyway, to which the composer insisted that Pollini group the performances of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* together, and not to present them out of order. In another instance, Wagner immediately refused his permission to a theatre director in Cologne who also wanted to begin his cycle performances with *Die Walküre*.53

Wagner also objected, at least initially, to making any alterations to the scores of the *Ring* operas, including cuts; in his application for *Die Walküre*, Botho von Hülsen, the director at the Berlin court theatre, demanded that the composer shorten the second act, which the Wagner refused to do. Eventually, Wagner did tolerate certain changes, which he recommended to be employed if the singers were found not to be up to the task. This was the reason for the omission of the Norns’ scene and the dialogue of Brünnhilde and Waltraute for the 1878 Leipzig performances of *Götterdämmerung*. According to Cosima, Wagner feared that since these scenes had not been carried out successfully at Bayreuth, removing them was the best way to prevent poorer interpretations of them in “ordinary” theatres.54 He later sanctioned use of the cut versions of the *Ring* operas for the Neumann tour, and as a result, they became the norm for performances outside of Bayreuth. In the late-1880s, Wagner’s former trusted assistant, the conductor Anton Seidl, also presented these cut versions to the American public.

53 See her entries for 25, 30 and 31 Oct 1877 in CWD 1, 990-92; also in CWD 2, 28 Jan and 30 Apr 1878; 33, 68.
54 CWD 2, 12 Jul 1878, 111.
Above all, Wagner sought to enforce his standards and conditions on subsequent *Ring* productions abroad when possible. Although he expressed dissatisfaction with the 1876 production, he felt that subsequent presentations should strive to replicate it, or at least, what he attempted to achieve it, especially if the *Ring* would not be performed again at Bayreuth in the foreseeable future. As he wrote to Emil Heckel in April 1878, “As I have been obliged to abandon repetitions of the Bayreuth performances, it is only through very careful reproduction on our ordinary public stage that my work (if it is not to be wholly lost or forgotten) can prove that it at least *retains* vitality and interest.”\(^{55}\) We already know that theatre directors were more than happy to duplicate the original, if only for box-office appeal, but for Wagner, this involved much more than simply copying sets and replicating the technology to create the special effects. Notably, he urged the various German directors, to whom he gave permission to present the *Ring*, to hire members of his production team who had assisted in the 1876 staging. For the Hamburg production, Wagner insisted that the director Pollini employ the machinist Carl Brandt and the artist Joseph Hoffmann, as well as Anton Seidl as conductor. (Pollini, in the end, accepted neither of the former and only hired the latter to direct the chorus.)\(^{56}\)

Only Neumann took Wagner’s recommendations seriously. In preparation for the September 1878 staging of *Siegfried* in Leipzig, Wagner wrote to the director, begging him to

…follow my scenic arrangements in Bayreuth as closely as possible; with the exception of certain minor details (comparatively trifling errors).

Do not fail to employ the Brückner Bros. in Coburg for the decorations and Brandt for the mechanical effects.

Take my advice and engage my young musical director Seidl for your rehearsals; it will cost you very little. Call Fricke down from Dessau too; he knows my ideas perfectly as to scenic arrangements and has served me well in these matters.\(^{57}\)

Neumann, for the most part, adhered to Wagner’s advice. For his *Ring* productions in Leipzig, Berlin, and London, as well as for the cross-continental tour, the Bayreuth scenery was copied, and the costumes and props replicated from Carl Doepler’s designs. When possible, he

\(^{55}\) In LRW 2, 292.
\(^{56}\) CWD 1, 14 Nov 1877, 996.
consulted Fricke and Brandt on staging and technical matters. To sing the principal roles, he hired the foremost Wagner interpreters of the day, most of whom had previously worked closely with the composer in Bayreuth or elsewhere. But perhaps Neumann’s most significant appointment was that of Seidl. The young conductor had been one of Wagner’s key assistants in preparing the Ring cycle’s premiere, copying parts and conducting rehearsals. He knew the scores intimately, having studied them with the composer, but more importantly, through his experience in helping Wagner coordinate the stage action and the music, he understood well the integration of these essential components. It was Seidl’s thorough grasp of this principle that Wagner repeatedly pressed Neumann to engage the conductor for his productions. While Seidl could only assist in the preparations for the Leipzig performances (the resident conductor Josef Sucher was then still under contract), he was subsequently engaged as Neumann’s chief conductor for the Berlin and London premieres of the Ring, and for the pan-European tour. This period thus signaled the beginning of his career as a principal heir to Wagner’s legacy.

Even with direct access to Wagner’s recommended team of advisors and artists, reproducing the 1876 Bayreuth staging of the Ring nevertheless proved to be a significant challenge for Neumann and other German theatre directors. Given that these resources (i.e. the knowledge and experience embodied in these individuals) were barely available to Fryer and Neuendorff, let alone exported across the Atlantic, the first American performances of Die Walküre probably fared quite poorly by comparison. With such deficiencies, it is perhaps not surprising that no other American impresario attempted to stage any of the Ring operas for almost another decade. For his part, Neumann (with Wagner’s consent) had hoped to bring his travelling production of the cycle to the United States, but these plans did not materialize. Eventually, the mission fell to Seidl, who came to the United States in late 1885 to assume the post of chief conductor at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House. His arrival would help usher in a crucial new phase in the American performance of the Ring cycle.
Until the presentations at the Metropolitan Opera, Americans could only experience live staged performances of the *Ring* operas across the Atlantic, in those theatres and cities which Wagner had allowed them to be mounted. Given that going to see an opera at a foreign theatre was not an uncommon activity for cultivated Americans visiting Europe, it is fairly safe to assume that some did witness these productions. Otherwise, reports about these stagings surfaced occasionally in American newspapers or journals.\(^{58}\) Meanwhile, some Americans continued to invest in the future of the Bayreuth Festival, and they established Wagner societies to raise awareness and funds. Evidence of their financial assistance and participation can be found in the late-nineteenth-century issues of the *Bayreuther Blätter*, the monthly newsletter first founded by Wagner in 1878 for patrons of the Festival, and edited by Hans von Wolzogen.

Along with articles on German culture and Wagner’s music, the *Blätter* periodically published membership and subscription information, as well as donations received. As this data indicates, by 1884, Wagner societies had been established in six major American cities, each headed by a representative who was in charge of obtaining donations, and forwarding them on to Bayreuth. Most of these delegates were German-born Americans of relative prominence; they included: Dr. Paul Haupt (Baltimore), a professor of Semitic languages at Johns Hopkins University; Georg Henschel (Boston), the first conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra; Carl Wolfsohn (Chicago), a highly reputable chamber musician (he performed often with Theodore Thomas in the early 1860s) and director of the Beethoven vocal societies in Philadelphia and in Chicago; A. Gebhard (New Yor), profession unknown; and Anton Glötzner (Washington), a pianist, music instructor, and composer. The only American-born representative was William C. Todd (Newburyport), a former school teacher and principal who had acquired his

\(^{58}\) For example, *Dwight’s Journal of Music* contained a few foreign press articles about productions of the *Ring* in Vienna, Leipzig, and Hamburg. See Hanslick’s review of *Götterdämmerung* in Vienna for the *Neue Freie Presse*, translation reprinted from the *London Musical World* in DJM 39, no. 992 (26 Apr 1879): 67–68; also Dwight’s translation of a letter from Botho von Hülsen to the publisher of the *Musikzeitung* regarding his negotiations with Wagner to present the cycle in Berlin in DJM 41, no. 1042 (26 Mar 1881): 51.
wealth through investments in a cotton mill.\textsuperscript{59} In the 1890s, the number of American \textit{Wagner-Vereine} expanded to include one in Philadelphia led by Dr. Chas Herwisch, and remarkably, a student society of 160 female members at Wellesley College in Boston.

According to the \textit{Bayreuther Blätter’s} published financial records, over 3,200 German marks in membership dues, subscriptions, and donations were received from Americans between 1878 and 1891, equivalent to around 800 American dollars.\textsuperscript{60} Monetary contributions from the U.S. societies peaked in the early-1880s, perhaps not surprisingly, as Wagner’s newest work, \textit{Parsifal}, had its premiere at the second Bayreuth Festival in 1882, which, according to several newspaper reports, was attended by a sizeable number of Americans.\textsuperscript{61} Wolzogen himself seemed to have played some role in fundraising, since he sought the aid of well-known American Wagner supporters like B.J. Lang in Boston, to solicit for contributions.\textsuperscript{62} He also appeared to have thought Americans might be more amenable to supporting Wagner’s endeavors if they knew what the composer thought of them and the “New World.” It was probably to this end that Wolzogen wrote the article, “The Work and Mission of My Life”, which appeared in 1879 over two issues of the \textit{North American Review}, America’s oldest literary magazine.\textsuperscript{63} Published under Wagner’s name, the essay, an account of “his” views on German culture and the position of his music-dramas vis-à-vis its history, intentionally flatters German-Americans for being the “true Germans” (compared to the “Philistines” who remained in the “Old World”), and America as the place where German art (and thus, his music) can progress unimpeded, “unoppressed by the wretched burdens left upon it by a melancholy history!”\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{60} The exchange rate used here is from 1884, when one American dollar was equivalent to 4.10 German marks, as indicated in the \textit{Blätter} published for April 1884.
\textsuperscript{61} For example, see the report sent by an “occasional correspondent” of the \textit{New York Tribune} who had travelled from California to attend a performance; 18 Aug 1882, 5.
\textsuperscript{62} Wolzogen’s appeal to B.J. Lang was reprinted in DJM 40, no. 1010 (3 Jan 1880): 4–5.
\textsuperscript{64} Quotation is from Part 1, 109.
Americans responded to these ideas remains unclear, but it is worth noting that for his part, Wagner thought the piece to be “sehr unreif” (“very immature”) and was reluctant to sign it over for publication.\textsuperscript{65} Yet, he had complied to it being published, perhaps thinking at the time that the article could help him gain American support and other assistance should he decide to immigrate to there, a move he was then contemplating, as we have seen.

Lest one should think that Americans were exceptionally generous to the Wagner cause, it should be noted that based on the data from the \textit{Blätter}, the U.S. donations did not form a significant share of the total amount contributed. While there might have been more American money that was funneled to Bayreuth but not reported in the journal, the greatest proportion of donations clearly came from Wagner societies in German towns and cities. Similarly, the readership of the journal did not extend much beyond the borders of Germany; the number of American subscribers peaked in the early 1880s at just over 40 (out of approximately 1,400 total), with the majority from New York (at 37), plus one or two from Boston, Richmond (VA), Albany (NY), and Baltimore. Although language might have prevented a broader circulation of the \textit{Blätter} in the U.S., it is more likely that the journal’s articles, many of which encompassed topics beyond Wagner and his works, including Germanic history, literature, culture, and politics (usually with an overtly nationalistic, anti-Semitic, and racist slant), were not of significant interest to many Americans, including German-Americans.\textsuperscript{66}

On the other hand, within American musical culture, Wagner’s music was becoming more popular than ever. This period, in particular, witnessed a significant rise in the performance of concert excerpts from his operas, in and beyond the “Wagner centers” of New York, Boston, and Chicago. It was primarily due to the aggressive promotional efforts of conductors like Theodore Thomas and Leopold Damrosch, who programmed the extracts on

\textsuperscript{65} That Wolzogen penned this article is now a fairly indisputable fact; as Cosima had recorded in her diary on 1 May 1879, “R’s morning work the perusal of a Wolz. manuscript for America, which R. will have to sign and which seems to him very immature.” In CWD 2, 300. Wagner apparently forbade any further publication of it after September 1879.

their extensive tours across the United States. Even with the introduction of staged
presentations of the *Ring* operas after 1885, excerpts were the chief medium by which most
Americans at the time experienced the cycle’s music. For this reason, the musical content of
these extracts merits comparison to the operas in order to illuminate what audiences heard, and
how these portions were believed (or not) to facilitate understanding of the original work.

Conductors also employed various programming strategies to help build appreciation for
these extracts. Two major initiatives led by Thomas are examined here, namely the 1882 May
Festival and the 1884 Wagner Festival, in which selections from the *Ring* operas were heavily
represented. Although it may be considered a controversial practice nowadays, American
conductors and critics then saw the dissemination and repeated performance of sections from
Wagner’s cycle as important to the cultivation of musical taste of U.S. audiences. The durability
of this notion is significant, since these excerpts appeared regularly in orchestral concerts, as
well as in recital and concert band programs until well into the early twentieth century.

**Part II: The *Ring* in Fragments: The Music of the Cycle in Concert**

Following the premiere of the *Ring* in Bayreuth, several conductors in the United States
sought to capitalize on, and foster, Americans’ developing interest in the music of the cycle by
introducing new excerpts into concerts. Among them, Theodore Thomas continued to be the
most prominent champion, despite his earlier disappointment over the circumstances of the
*Centennial March* commission. He led his orchestra in the first American performances of the
“Vorspiel” from *Götterdämmerung* in New York (29 November 1876) and in Boston (19 February
1877). He also conducted the initial presentations of two excerpts from *Siegfried*, notably,
“Forest Murmurs”, or *Waldweben*, at a Gilmore Gardens concert in New York (2 July 1878), and
the “Forging Songs” with the New York Philharmonic Society (11 Dec 1880).

Meanwhile, Leopold Damrosch’s reputation as a conductor of Wagner was on the rise.
Within only a few months after the Bayreuth Festival, he directed the American premieres of the
entire first act of *Die Walküre* on November 4, 1876, with the Philharmonic Society and several singers, and the complete third act of *Siegfried* on April 16, 1880, with soloists and the New York Symphony Society. Besides Thomas and Damrosch, a couple of lesser-known conductors were responsible as well for introducing additional excerpts from the *Ring*. “Siegfried’s Funeral March” from *Götterdämmerung* and the Introduction and First Scene from *Das Rheingold* were presented for the first time by Reinhold Schmelz with an unnamed ensemble at New York’s Steinway Hall (on November 11 and December 14, 1876, respectively). In April 1884, Americans finally heard “Siegfried’s Rhine Journey” from *Götterdämmerung*, the last excerpt to be introduced; the performance, which also took place at Steinway Hall, was conducted by Frank van der Stucken.

All these excerpts, along with the three selections from *Die Walküre* premiered earlier by Thomas and his orchestra in 1872 and 1875, comprise the main selections from the *Ring* operas that were popularized in American orchestral concerts during the late nineteenth century (see Figure 3.3). The exact methods by which the various conductors obtained the scores and parts are not known. By 1876, they would have had access to the first editions of Karl Klindworth’s piano scores and Wagner’s full orchestral scores to the entire *Ring* cycle, all of which were published by the Mainz firm of B. Schott’s Söhne. A number of arrangements that Wagner had conducted in concerts were also made available (the composer had not allowed their publication until after the *Ring* cycle’s premiere). Since the majority of the cycle’s excerpts were premiered in the United States after 1876, it is likely that instead of creating their own arrangements, Thomas, Damrosch and other conductors acquired and used these published versions, though perhaps modifying the orchestration to suit their own available

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67 See discussion in WWV. To summarize, Klindworth’s piano scores were published in 1861 (*Das Rheingold*); 1865 (*Die Walküre*); 1871 (*Siegfried*); and 1875 (*Götterdämmerung*). The first editions of the full score followed, respectively, in 1873, 1874, 1875/76, and 1876.

68 Exact publication dates of these excerpts are unclear, with the exception of “Der Ritt der Walküren” which was published by Schott in November 1876. It is believed that the versions published were close to the ones Wagner used for the concerts he conducted between 1862 and 1875. See pp. 412–17 in WWV.
Figure 3.3. Orchestral Excerpts from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Known Performance by Wagner</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>First Known American Performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Das Rheingold</strong></td>
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| 26 Dec 1862; Vienna              | • *Der Raub des Rheingoldes*  
  [The Robbery of the Rhinegold]  
  Introduction and First Scene | 14 Dec 1876; New York;  
  Reinhold Schmelz and unnamed orchestra |
| 26 Dec 1862; Vienna              | • *Einzug der Götter in Walhalla*  
  [Entry of the Gods into Valhalla]  
  (Procession of the Gods into Valhalla)  
  (Rainbow Scene) | Date unknown; Chicago;  
  Theodore Thomas Orchestra |
| **Not Performed**                | Various fragments from Wagner’s score:  
  • Prelude and scene “In the Depths of the Rhine,”  
    up to the beginning of Scene 2  
    “before Walhall”; fragment, “Loge’s Tidings”;  
    grand closing scene, “Wotan, Donner, Froh, Loge,  
    and the Three Rhine Daughters”  
  • Prelude and scene, “The Theft of the Gold,”  
    “Wotan’s Apostrophe to Walhalla,” “Loge’s Tidings,”  
    Closing Scene  
  • Introduction and “Song of the Rhine Daughters,”  
    “Rainbow Scene,” and “The Maidens’ Lament” | 11 Mar 1882; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas and New York Philharmonic Society |
|                                 |         | 4 May 1882; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas and New York Philharmonic Society |
|                                 |         | 26 May 1882; Chicago;  
  Theodore Thomas Orchestra |
| **Die Walküre**                  |         |                                 |
| 26 Dec 1862; Vienna              | • *Siegmunds Liebesgesang*  
  [Siegmund’s Love Song]  
  (Siegmund’s Spring Song)  
  (Winterstürme)  
  **Performed with or without soloist.** | Apr 1875; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas Orchestra |
| 26 Dec 1862; Vienna              | • *Der Ritt der Walküren*  
  [The Ride of the Valkyries]  
  (Walkürenritt) | 17 Sep 1872; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas Orchestra |
| 26 Dec 1862; Vienna              | • *Wotans Abschied und Feuerzauber*  
  [Wotan’s Farewell and Fire Music]  
  **Performed with or without soloist.** | 6 Jan 1875; Philadelphia;  
  Theodore Thomas Orchestra and Franz Remmertz, soloist |

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**Note:** Only the most commonly performed excerpts are listed. The titles used predominantly on concert programs are given here in German (italicized) and in English (in square brackets). Alternative titles that also appeared on American concert programs are indicated in regular brackets. The information on the American premieres is updated and compiled, in part, from FP and TMA 2.
### Figure 3.3, cont’d. Orchestral Excerpts from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Known Performance by Wagner</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>First Known American Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Siegfried</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
| 1 Jan 1863; Vienna                | • *Schmiedelieder*  
  (Forging Songs)  
  (The Welding of the Sword)  
  **Performed with or without a soloist.** | 11 Dec 1880; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas and  
  New York Philharmonic Society |
|                                  | • *Waldweben*  
  (Forest Murmurs) | 2 July 1878; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas Orchestra |
| **Götterdämmerung**              |         |                                  |
| **Not Performed**                | • Vorspiel (Scene with Brünnhilde and Siegfried)  
  **Performed with soloists.** | 29 Nov 1876; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas Orchestra with Hermione  
  Rodersdorff and H.A. Bischoff, soloists |
| **Not Performed**                | • *Siegfrieds Rheinfahrt*  
  (Siegfried’s Rhine Journey)  
  (Morning Dawn)  
  **Version by Engelbert Humperdinck.** | 4 Apr 1884; New York;  
  Frank Van der Stücken and unnamed orchestra |
| 1 Mar 1875; Vienna                | • *Trauermarsch beim Tode Siegfrieds*  
  (Siegfried’s Funeral March)  
  (Siegfried’s Death March)  | 11 Nov 1876; New York;  
  Reinhold Schmelz and unnamed orchestra |
| 1 Mar 1875; Vienna                | • Conclusion of the Final Act  
  (“Finale”) (Brünnhilde’s Immolation)  
  **Performed with or without a soloist.** | 6 Apr 1878; New York;  
  Theodore Thomas, New York Philharmonic Society and Eugenie  
  Pappenheim, soloist |

In order to determine how American audiences experienced the *Ring*’s music in this format of excerpts, we shall now consider the musical content of these selections as they were most commonly performed in U.S. concert halls.

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70 See for example, a published version of “Trauermarsch beim Tode’s Siegfried” (Siegfried’s Funeral March) with bowings in Thomas’s hand, held at the Music Library at the Rosenthal Archives of the Chicago Symphony (Archive No. MUS-B, 8726). The exceptions, however, are the scores used by Thomas and his orchestra for the American premieres of “The Ride of the Valkyries” (1872), “Wotan’s Farewell and Fire Music” (1875), and “Siegmund’s Love Song” (1875) from *Die Walküre*. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Thomas was refused access to these particular extracts from the *Ring* by Wagner in 1872 due to copyright issues. He nevertheless managed to acquire them by other means but unfortunately, their original source is unknown. Two of these arrangements are still extant: “Siegmund’s Love Song” (Archive No. MUS-A, 8688
The Music of Orchestral Excerpts from the Ring Cycle

To nineteenth-century ears, Wagnerian excerpts were rather distinct from the operatic numbers often taken from the popular Italian and French operas and commonly inserted into orchestral concert programs. While the latter type consisted mostly of arias or duets through which solo singers could display their vocal skills, Wagner’s plot-driven works had as its central feature the “continuous melody/recitative” united with the orchestra in an elevated role. As a result, the more easily extracted excerpts from the composer’s operas tended to be instrumental in nature, such as overtures, preludes, or interludes. The arrangements from the Ring were no exception, with many of the excerpts being pieces for orchestra only, extracted from either the purely orchestral parts of the score (e.g. “Siegfried’s Funeral March”), or performed in an arrangement with the text removed (e.g. “The Ride of the Valkyries”). In other selections, such as various monologues, “songs”, or “duets” (e.g. “Sieg mund’s Love Song”, “Wotan’s Farewell”), the text was maintained and a soloist was sometimes employed. Yet, these were often performed without soloists as well, with the voice-parts meshed into the score and intoned by instruments instead.

Of the excerpts from the Ring that were considered standard repertory for concerts, only four—“Sieg mund’s Love Song” (Siegmunds Liebesgesang), “Wotan’s Farewell and Fire Music” (Wotans Abschied und Feuerzauber), the “Forging Songs” (Schmiedelieder) and the “Finale” to Götterdämmerung (which usually included “Brünnhilde’s Immolation”—could have employed vocal soloists. Programs published in Thomas’s Musical Autobiography show that various performances of these particular selections did involve the participation of prominent singers.

These arrangements are similar to the original operatic score, aside from small alterations in

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This distinction was evident in the first American concerts incorporating Wagner’s music, for example, as early as 1853, when the Germania Musical Society presented their first “Grand Wagner Night” program. As Nancy Newman has noted, “the selections by Wagner were entirely instrumental, and the two vocalists Pintard and baritone F. Rudolph sang selections from the operas of Rossini and Bellini.” See “Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society and Transatlantic Musical Culture of the Mid-Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2002), 256.
orchestration and a minor reduction in parts. There are also arrangements of the same excerpts in which the text is absent, though the vocal line(s) are maintained to some extent. For instance, the manuscript of Thomas’s own transcription of “Siegmund’s Love Song” is a purely orchestral arrangement, in which Siegmund’s voice part is played by pairs of wind and brass instruments, in this case, flute and horn, and trumpet and trombone. Similarly with the orchestra-only transcription of “Wotan’s Farewell and Fire Music”, the god’s voice part is intoned by brass and wind instruments coupled together, including oboe and horn, trumpet and trombone, and bassoon and horn. By comparison, the excerpt “Entry of the Gods into Valhalla” (Einzug der Götter in Walhalla), which begins immediately after Donner’s song near the end of Das Rheingold, excludes all the voice parts sung by Froh, Wotan, and Loge, while the others are orchestrated; the Rhinemaidens’ “lament” is alternately played by combinations of wind instruments or upper strings. In these solely instrumental versions of the excerpts, only conspicuous melodic material from the voice parts and important motives are incorporated, while the drier, continuous dialogue has been entirely removed.

Other selections consist completely of orchestral music taken from the operatic score, such as the “Forest Murmurs” excerpt from Siegfried, “Siegfried’s Rhine Journey” and the “Funeral March” from Götterdämmerung, and the prelude and orchestral interludes accompanying the scenic transitions in Das Rheingold. In these sections of the operas, the music is supporting action on stage but no text is sung. The music for the “Funeral March”, for example, is taken unchanged from the opera score, beginning at the moment Siegfried dies and ending before Gutrune’s entrance at the beginning of Scene 3. The “Forest Murmurs” and the “Rhine Journey” arrangements, as well as Thomas’s own “Fragments” from Das Rheingold, were created by stringing large orchestral sections together, omitting the music from scenes

72 It is possible Wagner prepared both the purely instrumental and vocal versions of “Siegmund’s Love Song”, “Wotan’s Farewell”, and Siegfried’s “Forging Songs” just prior to his 1862/63 Vienna concerts. For subsequent performances, he may have used them interchangeably, depending on whether he had a suitable soloist.
between them that contain dialogue. The “Forest Murmurs” excerpt, for instance, is comprised of scenes 2 and 3 from Act II of *Siegfried.* Beginning after Mime has left Siegfried alone in the forest, music as in the opera score follows but with new material interpolated and with Siegfried’s voice part entirely absent. This leads into the moment after Fafner’s death (the horn call and scene with the dragon are omitted), when the Woodbird tells Siegfried to grab the ring and the tarnhelm from the dragon’s cave; her melody is played by flute and glockenspiel. From here, most of Scene 3 (i.e. the meeting of Mime and Alberich, the Woodbird’s warnings to Siegfried about Mime followed by Siegfried’s encounter with the dwarf, and after Mime’s death the Woodbird’s song to Siegfried about Brünnhilde) is bypassed in favor of the passage in which Siegfried asks the bird if he is the one to awaken Brünnhilde; the arrangement then culminates in the jubilant music heard at the end of the scene.

“Siegfried’s Rhine Journey” is similarly comprised of three main orchestral sections from before Act I. The first of these, sometimes identified as “Morning Dawn,” begins right after the Norns’ scene and continues until the dialogue begins between Siegfried and Brünnhilde; the second section follows from the moment Siegfried parts from Brünnhilde; and the third section consists of the orchestral transition to the first act, as Siegfried makes his way to the Gibichungs on the Rhine. Likewise, the various arrangements of “fragments” from *Das Rheingold* consist mostly of the orchestral opening and the scenic transitions strung together in order. Certain motives are highlighted, notably, the Rhinemaidens’ praise of the gold in the first scene (their voice parts played by winds—flutes, oboes, English horn, and clarinets); the entrance of the giants in the second scene with segments of Fasolt’s voice represented by a trombone; Donner’s song (“Heda!”), intoned by two horns; and the Rhinemaidens’ lament over the loss of the gold, performed by three trumpets. Any dialogue that occurs over a particular orchestral

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73 The *Waldweben* excerpt was not among the excerpts Wagner himself conducted but it was probably adapted from the full score of *Siegfried.*

74 The version published and most commonly performed in the United States was one by Engelbert Humperdinck (exact date of publication unknown). It is probably similar to the one Wagner created for the Vienna concerts he conducted in March 1875.
section is excluded. The separation of the orchestra’s role from the sung parts is even more complete in the excerpt, “The Ride of the Valkyries”. In Wagner’s version, the orchestral part has been directly extracted from the opera score but the vocal lines are absent; sections that contain dialogue between the sisters are avoided. Thomas’s own, slightly lengthier score of the same excerpt, however, does incorporate snippets of the Valkyrie lines in the wind parts (e.g. the cry of “Hojotoho!” is played by a solo clarinet.)

Since most of the excerpts from the Ring operas feature the orchestra more prominently than the voice, it suggests that American audiences at this time mostly experienced them as orchestral pieces, with the occasional addition of the text sung by a soloist. Ever since Wagner first previewed the Ring in this format to European audiences, several generations of critics have pointed out the contradiction inherent in the practice. In their view, the distillation of the musical content of the cycle into several fragments essentially undermined the integrity of the “total work of art”, a central principle of Wagner’s aesthetic theory for opera, and one he claimed the cycle exemplified. Fundamentally, these so-called “bleeding chunks”, detached from the surrounding context of the drama, with limited text and the absence of stage action, are very much not the same as if they are experienced within the operas in fully mounted performances. While Wagner had attempted to fill these gaps with explanatory program notes, the Ring as condensed into concert excerpts can give a misleading impression of the entire work, sometimes hindering full comprehension of even these excerpted parts of the operas. (As William Germano has observed, Siegmund’s “Winterstürme” or “Love Song” is not simply a song about love or spring.) In their early reviews of staged performances, American critics often described their surprise at hearing certain extracts in their proper context for the first time.

75 Wagner had intended it this way, as he had written in October 1862 to the conductor-composer Wendelin Weißheimer, to whom he had sent a copy of the arrangement, indicating “it should be played by orchestra alone, without voice parts.” See discussion in WWV, 414–15.
76 See William Germano’s article, “Wagner in Pieces: Opera, the Fragment, and Acoustic Totality,” in The Opera Quarterly 23, nos. 2-3 (2008): 277–94. Germano specifically considers issues of “fragmentariness” and Wagnerian excerpts in the development of sound recording during the twentieth century. His discussion,
On the other hand, there is no denying that these excerpts were effective with audiences precisely because they made the *Ring* cycle easier to digest; minus the "continuously melodic" dialogue, they were more palatable. Wagner himself had understood early on that if his monumental "stage-festival-play" of “three evenings and a prologue" was to be carried out successfully, not only would he have to be in complete control of all aspects of its presentation, he would also have to mediate its reception. By offering musical samples of the operas in concerts leading up to the Bayreuth Festival, he was able to simultaneously promote the event while preparing future audiences for an experience of an unprecedented nature. After the cycle’s premiere, however, Wagner became markedly ambivalent about maintaining the practice of giving concert excerpts. Still, many conductors had no qualms about adopting the composer's earlier strategy. Because the *Ring* operas were so difficult to stage, concerts became the most convenient method to sustain public interest in the work, while also grooming audiences for potential performances at local theatres. American conductors like Thomas and Damrosch were no exception, and they devised various strategies to popularize the music of the *Ring* throughout the United States.

*The Ring Excerpts in Theodore Thomas’s 1882 May Festival and 1884 Wagner Festival*

Although Damrosch and Thomas had become intense rivals by the late 1870s, the latter was still perhaps the most influential conductor of Wagner’s music in the United States during the first half of the following decade. After a brief period in Cincinnati and a summer tour in Europe, Thomas returned to New York in 1880 to take up with renewed fervor his promotion of Wagner extracts, particularly from the *Ring*. For the next five years, he programmed many of the cycle’s excerpts (summarized in Figure 3.4) for his concert seasons with the New York and

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77 For further discussion on this topic, see Nicholas Vazsonyi’s *Richard Wagner: Self-promotion and the making of a brand* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially 190–93.
Brooklyn Philharmonic Societies, as well as for the Summer Night Concerts in Chicago.

The positive reception he received for these concerts further invigorated Thomas to pursue more ambitious projects that enabled him to disseminate these pieces more widely. Two endeavors in particular featured the *Ring* cycle’s music most heavily. The first of these was a five-day music festival at New York’s Seventh Regiment Armory in early May 1882. From May 2 to 6, Thomas conducted seven different programs which were performed by staggeringly large forces: an orchestra of over 200 players; several choruses (the New York-Brooklyn chorus of 1,200 singers, the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, the Cecilian Society of Philadelphia, the Musical Association Chorus of Worcester, the Oratorio Association of Baltimore, and the Choral Society of Reading); and several star soloists, including Amalie Materna, who had sung the part of Brünnhilde for the premiere of the *Ring* at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival.\(^78\) The fourth concert of the festival, entitled the “Wagner Program”, was comprised entirely of excerpts from all operas of the cycle, presented in chronological order; the program, which lasted for two-and-a-half hours, is transcribed in Figure 3.5. It was the first time (outside the Festival setting) that some Americans could experience a sense of the complete work in one sitting.

Determined to present a concert of high quality and exacting standards, Thomas had engaged his musicians in a rigorous schedule of rehearsals, and the results did not disappoint. Critics praised the orchestra and the singers for their excellent performances.\(^79\) The *New York Tribune*’s correspondent went as far as to say that Thomas’s orchestra sounded “incomparably finer” than the Bayreuth orchestra under Hans Richter in 1876, especially their interpretations of “The Ride of the Valkyries” and “Siegfried’s Funeral March”. The soprano Amalie Materna, who reprised her role as Brünnhilde, effusively praised Thomas for his skills as a conductor. “I can give no better idea of my opinion of this concert,” she told his wife Rose Fay,

\(^78\) See MTT, 217–36; also *New York Times*, 2 May 1882, 4.
\(^79\) See, for example, the reviews in the *New York Times*, 5 May 1882, 4; and *New York Tribune*, 5 May 1882, 5.
### Figure 3.4. Excerpts from the *Ring* conducted by Theodore Thomas between 1880–1884.

| *Die Walküre*  | “Sieg mund’s Love Song” (with soloist)  
|                | “The Ride of the Valkyries”  
|                | “Wotan’s Abschied” and “Feuerzauber” (with soloist) |
| *Siegfried*    | “The Welding of the Sword” (with soloists)  
|                | “Waldweben” |
| *Götterdämmerung* | “Morning Dawn” and “Siegfried’s Rhine Journey”  
|                | Act III, Scene 1, “The Three Rhine Daughters and Siegfried”; Scene 2, “Siegfried, Hagen, Gunther”  
|                | “Siegfried’s Death” |

### Figure 3.5. Wagner Program for the New York Music Festival, 4 May 1882.

*Das Rheingold*
- Prelude and scene. The Rape of the Gold.
- Walhalla.
- Loge’s Tidings.

*Die Walküre*
- Prelude—First Act.
- Sieg mund’s Love Song.
- The Ride of the Valkyries.
- Wotan’s Farewell to Brünnhilde. Magic fire scene.

INTERMISSION

*Siegfried*
- The Forging of the Sword. Final Scene—First Act.

*Götterdämmerung*
- Siegfried’s Death.
- Brünnhilde’s Immolation. Finale of the Tetralogy.

Soloists: Mme. Materna, Misses Schell, Wurmb, and Henne; Messrs. Campanini, Galassi, Candidus, Toedt, Remmertz, and Steins

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80 The titles of these arrangements were taken from the programs listed in TMA 2.  
...than by saying that when I was listening to it I was wishing that Wagner himself were here to hear his music rendered so perfectly. It was magnificent, grand, and so far as the orchestra was concerned, nothing could be finer. [...] That here, in America, Thomas so faithfully reproduced the same effects which I myself have heard Wagner studiously teach his musicians, amazes me.82

According to the Tribune’s critic, about 8,000 people attended the concert, nearly filling the entire hall of the Armory, and it was noted that their “behavior […] was most praiseworthy, and gave testimony of the influence exerted by the wonderful music.” He found their response to the concert to be quite remarkable overall, observing that

Public interest in the concert seemed to have been raised to the highest pitch, and the enthusiasm of the crowded audience found vent in demonstrations surpassing even those which hailed the extraordinary interpretation of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony [last evening]. To say the performance was brilliantly successful is very feebly to indicate its effect.

Rose Fay Thomas also confirmed that the program of Ring excerpts was by far the best received by the critics and the audience. As she noted, “the greatest and most enduring effect was made by the Wagner program. This performance created the greatest excitement I ever witnessed in a concert.”83 Evidently, Americans in New York had become very keen to hear the

82 MTT, 228.
composer’s most advanced work.

After the New York festival, Thomas and his orchestra gave a similar set of performances in Cincinnati, and then travelled to Chicago. There, a third festival took place in the city’s Exposition building during the last week of May, where the same all-Ring program received a repeat performance on May 26. Not unlike the New York audience, Chicagoans, which, according to the Chicago Daily Tribune, were estimated to have numbered over 5,000 at the concert, responded with enthusiasm, and even mania for certain excerpts, such as “The Ride of the Valkyries”. Although the singers’ voices were sometimes drowned out by the huge ensemble, and nuance of interpretation often lost in the general noise of the auditorium, the critic of the Daily Tribune commended the musicianship of the orchestra and the singers. Nevertheless, he emphasized that only through a fully staged performance could one actually appreciate these excerpts in their proper dramatic contexts. Notably, the music and motives of Das Rheingold, he felt, were less interesting and seemed incomplete in the concert format without their visual complements. Even so, the critic thought the program was timely and significant, stating that Chicagoans were now prepared, thanks to Thomas’s educational efforts to expose Americans to Wagner’s music, for “a longer and more comprehensive journey into the Wagner domain—a journey which should afford flying glances at the whole trilogy.”

A few conclusions can be drawn from the reception of this Festival in New York. Evidently, there was a huge interest in concerts featuring excerpts for Wagner’s works, with Americans attending them in the thousands for some performances. Not surprisingly, in featuring such large performing forces, thereby creating an impressive visual and aural spectacle, such concerts were calculated to attract a considerable number of attendees. These audiences were probably quite diverse demographically, comprised of a mixture of social and economic classes (as tickets were likely to be more affordable for the lower and middle classes than going to the opera house), and almost certainly attracted the significant German-American

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84 Chicago Daily Tribune, 27 May 1882, 6.
population, among others, of the city. It bears mentioning as well that the success of these concerts must have owed much to the quality of the music-making. Weeks of rigorous rehearsal and repeated performances of Wagner excerpts would have surely honed the technique and musicianship of the players in Thomas's orchestra for that repertoire (which was not without its challenges). That critics were suggesting that Americans (at least those exposed to Thomas’s programs) were ready to graduate to fully staged performances of the Ring operas appears to testify to the effectiveness of Thomas’s efforts to groom them for the experience.

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The second of Thomas’s ventures to bring Wagner’s music to the broad American public took place in the spring of 1884. Titled the “Wagner Festival” tour, it was the first North American musical excursion to feature excerpts from the composer’s operas almost exclusively. Beginning in Boston on April 14, the orchestra gave seventy consecutive performances in nineteen cities, including New York, Philadelphia, Richmond (Virginia), Washington D.C., Baltimore, Portland (Maine), Boston, New York, and Philadelphia for a second time, Cincinnati, Chicago, and ending on June 28 in Montreal, the orchestra’s first visit to Canada’s then-largest city. The orchestra, led by Wagner’s former Bayreuth concertmaster August Wilhemj, was enlarged to 150 musicians; when required, a chorus of 600 to 700 strong—New York’s Liederkranz Chorus augmented by local singing ensembles whenever possible—joined them.\(^{85}\) For the solo singers, Thomas believed it was important for American audiences to hear the foremost interpreters of Wagner of the day, and he managed to employ a few of those with whom Wagner had worked at the Festspielhaus, notably, the soprano Amalie Materna, the tenor Hermann Winkelmann, and the bass Emil Scaria. (These singers had most recently created the principal roles for Parsifal at the 1882 Bayreuth Festival.) Other vocalists already familiar to concert goers in the United States, including the famed Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson, as

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\(^{85}\) TMA 1, 93. It should be noted that expanded forces were a common feature of festival ensembles so the critics did not find them to be especially peculiar. Indeed, such large groups of musicians were probably required in order to be heard effectively in some of the larger venues on the orchestra’s tour.
well as Emma Juch, Max Heinrich, and Franz Remmertz, also joined the roster. Overall, the tour was an unprecedented event, both in its near-exclusive focus on Wagner’s music and the number of audiences across North America who would hear it. For Thomas himself, his wife testified that “All things considered, this was, artistically, the most important concert tour he ever made, as well as one of the longest.”

To provide a glimpse into the demanding schedule endured by the musicians and the types of programs they gave on the “Wagner Festival” tour, Figure 3.6 summarizes their performance dates in Boston, New York, and Chicago, and the programs performed in Boston from April 14 to 17. These programs were likely repeated multiple times, although there might have been changes in the order of performance, and depending on the audience expected for each city, some variation in the proportion that was Wagner’s music. For example, with the exception of Beethoven’s Third and Fifth Symphonies, all of the Boston concerts were comprised entirely of Wagner’s music whereas in the six concerts performed in Chicago, only one of them was an all-Wagner concert. The music from the Ring was strongly represented among the programs given, with excerpts from the entire cycle appearing in concerts comprising of a mixture of works (i.e. there were no “all-Ring” concerts as in the 1882 May Festival). Thomas appears to have preferred to group together extracts from the same act and performed in order, thus maintaining something of the dramatic structure of the operas. On occasion, entire acts were given.

Thomas’s touring Wagner festival attracted the interest of critics from major local newspapers who attended and reviewed each concert. Some correspondents even travelled to other cities along the route to observe and evaluate those performances as well; among them, the critic of the New York Times wrote reviews on the Boston, New York, and Chicago festivals,

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86 MTT, 260.
87 This information is compiled from local newspaper articles, MTT, and the Wagner handbook for the festival concerts given in 1884 under the direction of Theodore Thomas; analytic programmes with English texts, biographic and critical essays by Henry T. Finck (Cambridge, MA: J. Wilson and son, 1884). An original copy of Finck’s handbook is available at Loeb Music Library at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
Figure 3.6. Theodore Thomas and the Wagner Festival Tour, April 14–June 28, 1884.

a. Performances in Boston, New York, and Chicago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performances total</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics' Hall, Boston</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>April 14 (evening), April 15 (evening),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April 16 (afternoon; evening), April 17</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(afternoon; evening), May 8 (afternoon;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>evening), May 9 (evening), May 10 (afternoon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Opera House, New</td>
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<td>April 22 (evening), April 24 (evening),</td>
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<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 26 (evening), May 7 (evening), May</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 (afternoon; evening), May 9 (evening),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 10 (evening)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposition Building, Chicago</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>May 27 (evening), May 28 (evening), May 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(afternoon; evening), May 30 (evening),</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 31 (evening)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. A selection of programs from the Boston concerts.

Monday evening, April 14

I. Selections from *Tannhäuser*.
   a) Overture, Bacchanale, Chorus of Sirens, Act I.
   b) Scenes 1, 2, 3, Act II.
   c) March and Chorus. *Intermission*
II. *Die Walküre*, Act III.
   a) Ride of the Valkyries.
   b) Wotan's Farewell.
   c) Magic Fire Scene.
III. *Siegfried* – Finale, Act III. Siegfried's Wooing.

Tuesday evening, April 15

I. Beethoven, Symphony No. 3 *Intermission*
II. *Die Meistersinger*, Act III.
   a) Prelude.
   b) Sachs' Monologue.
   c) Quintet.
   d) Chorus of Cobbler's, Tailors, and Bakers.
   e) Dance of Apprentices.
   f) Procession of Mastersingers.
   g) Chorus, "Awake!"
   h) Prize Song and Finale. *Intermission*

Wednesday afternoon, April 16

I. *Centennial Exhibition March*.
II. *Das Rheingold*.
   a) Alberich and the Rhinemaidens.
   b) Wotan beholds Walhalla.
   c) Loge's Narrative: Gold versus Love.
   d) The Rainbow Bridge and the Maidens' Lament.
III. *Die Walküre*, Act III.
   a) Ride of the Valkyries.
   b) Brünnhilde's Supplication.
   c) Wotan's Farewell.
   d) Magic Fire Scene.

Wednesday evening, April 16

I. *Huldigungsmarsch*.
II. Selections from *Tristan und Isolde*.
   a) Vorspiel, Act I.
   b) Love-duo and Finale, Act II. *Intermission*
III. Selections from *Parsifal*.
   a) Vorspiel, Act I.
   b) Flower-girl Scene, Kundry's Solicitations, Act II.
   c) Good Friday Spell, Funeral Procession, Finale, Act III.

Thursday afternoon, April 17

I. Selections from *The Flying Dutchman*.
   a) Overture.
   b) Introduction, Spinning Chorus and Ballad, Act II.
II. Selections from *Die Meistersinger*.
   a) Vorspiel, Act I.
   b) Pogner's Address.
III. *Parsifal* – Flower-girl scene, Act III.
IV. *Die Walküre*, Act I
   a) Introduction.
   b) Siegmund's Love Song and Finale.

Thursday evening, April 17

I. Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 *Intermission*
II. *Götterdämmerung*, Act III. (Complete)
he of the *New York Tribune* on the Boston, New York, Baltimore, and Cincinnati concerts, and the critic of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on the Boston and Chicago festivals (the *Boston Daily Daily Advertiser* seemed to have covered the Boston performances only).\(^8\) Taken together, their evaluations of the performances were generally positive, and they commended Thomas and his business manager, Charles E. Locke, for having undertaken the endeavor and achieving “financial and artistic success”. It was reported that the concerts were well received by their respective audiences, who were repeatedly described as demonstrating sincere interest, attentiveness, and even enthusiasm. The number of attendees though, varied from city to city. According to Rose Fay Thomas, “the most important festivals of this tour were those of Boston, New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago”, possibly because these drew the largest audiences, from 5,000 to almost 10,000 people, among which many were likely from the substantial German-American populations of these cities, and where Thomas’s reputation was already well established.

Despite the relatively strong attendance at these festivals, Wagner’s music was not the sole reason that the concerts drew so many Americans. Many of the critics in Boston, New York, and Chicago believed that much of the fluctuation in audience size could be attributed to the presence or absence of a particular singer. Amalie Materna and Christine Nilsson were especially popular and if neither were singing, attendance dropped. Even so, enthusiasm for all-Wagner programs could not always be sustained. On May 29, a matinee concert consisting of the *Centennial March* and selections from *Lohengrin, Parsifal, Die Meistersinger*, and *Götterdämmerung*, drew to Chicago’s Exposition Hall an immense audience of nearly 10,000. However, with the length of the program at three hours total and the feeling of a lack of variety, the concert stretched the audience to its limits, and probably contributed to the dwindling

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\(^8\) On the Boston Wagner Festival, see *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 11 Apr 1884, 4; 15 Apr, 4; 16 Apr, 4; 17 Apr, 4; 18 Apr, 8; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Apr, 4; 15 Apr, 6; 16 Apr, 7; 8 May, 10; *New York Times*, 8 Apr, 1; 15 Apr, 4; *New York Tribune*: 11 Apr, 5; 15 Apr, 4; 16 Apr, 4; 17 Apr, 5; 18 Apr, 4. On the New York Wagner Festival, see *New York Times*, 23 Apr, 4; 25 Apr, 4; 28 Apr, 4; 8 May, 4; 10 May, 4; 11 May, 8; *New York Tribune*, 23 Apr, 4; 25 Apr, 4; 27 Apr, 6; 8 May, 4; 10 May, 4; 11 May, 6. On the Chicago Wagner Festival, see *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 May, 9; 29 May, 3; 30 May, 3; 31 May, 3; *New York Times*, 29 May, 1.
attendance for the final three concerts of the series, the last of which Thomas did away with Wagner’s music entirely and presented Gounod’s *Redemption* instead.

That such massive audiences attended the all-Wagner concerts is rather astounding, even by today’s standards. Yet, a few of the American critics began to question the purpose of these events. Among them, the *New York Times* reviewer complained that even if the excerpts were well-performed by impressive forces, the concerts have not “done much to advance the Wagnerian cause.” He especially feared that with the growing ubiquity of concerts featuring only excerpts from Wagner’s operas, American audiences were becoming too accustomed to experiencing the works in a format that the composer did not intend, that is, unstaged, and in a limited number of discrete sections. In his opinion, this arrangement was an inherently unsatisfying way to enjoy them:

An aria by Verdi or a duet by Meyerbeer can be borne with in the concert-room, for these numbers are, to a certain extent, complete in themselves. But an excerpt from a Wagner opera, whereof the music in its entirety is declared to be one unbroken melody, and the drama and score combined are considered as one whole and perfect chrysolite, has little significance, and still less charm.\(^89\)

Moreover, he thought that of Wagner’s works, the *Ring* operas especially should be performed completely and fully staged, so that the audience could experience the music within the appropriate dramatic context of the entire score. As he reflected:

Perhaps the production of one or more of the operas of the Trilogy, with the forces at hand and with proper scenery and costume, would have enlightened the American public more effectually as to the overwhelming beauty and force of Wagner’s writings. That these are not destined for exposition in the concert-room need scarcely be repeated, and until local audiences behold singers of the school of Mme. Materna and Herr Winkelmann in a Wagner opera, they cannot be considered competent to pass judgment upon the claims of the great iconoclast to immortality.\(^90\)

On the other hand, the critic of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* was skeptical about whether American audiences would ever be willing to undergo the “necessary education” to truly appreciate the composer’s music. Even in the form of extracts, Wagner opera still required

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initiation to be understood and enjoyed:

In order to fully enjoy the works of Wagner one should be fully acquainted with them; should understand the theory of their composition and the legend and incidents of each; should know by heart the different “motives” which are the keys, as it were, both to situations and to characteristics, and should be prepared for their appearance and ready to recognize them in their various mutations and combinations. To be able to do this cannot come in a day, and mere reading and study will not give the power, even though one be helped and enlightened by such plain and adequate expositions as Mr. Apthorp has been giving in the columns of the *Transcript*. After the preparatory study, frequent hearings are necessary before the just meaning and proportion even of single scenes can be appreciated. Until such an education has been acquired, the effect is as of a vast and varied country, wherein no certain pathway appears, and each allurement leads the wanderer to still greater bewilderment and doubt.\(^\text{91}\)

For his part, Thomas appeared to have anticipated some of these criticisms regarding the format of his concerts. He was no doubt aware that his audiences would benefit from some guidance and he did attempt to provide some of this “necessary education” through the careful construction of his programs. As is evident in Figure 3.6b, his Wagner concerts tended to progress chronologically through the works of the composer, beginning with selections from those with which the audience was already quite familiar (e.g. *Tannhäuser* or *Lohengrin*), and then moving on to later works, such as the *Ring* operas or *Parsifal*, in the latter part of the program. This format also had the purpose of leading the listener through the evolution of Wagner’s musical aesthetic, as it became increasingly advanced. In both these respects, it is quite likely that Thomas was following the precedent set by Wagner himself, who, as Nicholas Vaszonyi has pointed out, also constructed his own concerts that featured his works in this way, as a form of graduated preparation for staged performances. Wagner (as did Thomas) also liked to combine selections from his operas with symphonies or overtures by Mozart and Beethoven on the same program. The aim here was to show Wagner as the inheritor of the now-venerated Austro-German tradition, of which his music-dramas could be seen as the culmination.\(^\text{92}\)

Thomas’s 1884 festival had a strong supporter in Henry T. Finck, then the music critic of the *New York Evening Post* and the *Nation*, who had produced an accompanying “handbook” to

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\(^{91}\) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 Apr 1884, 6.  
the festival that was distributed to American concert-goers. The booklet is 112 pages long, and clearly conveys an educative purpose; its contents include: the programs to every concert of the festival; several articles by Finck explaining the “innovative elements” of Wagner’s music (e.g. his use of orchestral effects, leading motives, etc.); brief summaries of the genesis and the early reception of Wagner’s operas from Rienzi to Parsifal; artist biographies; and detailed program notes. For each of the Ring excerpts, plot synopses were provided for context, as well as the text (where applicable) in English, taken from Alfred Forman’s 1877 translation. A number of engravings by a mysterious “Th” are also interpolated throughout the notes, depicting the various scenes being performed. As Finck explained, these illustrations were intended to “atone [to some extent] for the absence of scenery,” a mode of presentation, which he hoped “will be found more acceptable than the usual one of giving technical analyses, which are intelligible to those only who do not need them.”

More importantly for Thomas, Finck, in an article for the handbook, sought to justify the relevancy of performing Wagner’s music in the concert hall. Beyond the fact that Wagner himself established the practice, Finck believed that one advantage of presenting just the “highlights” from the operas was that this format was more appealing to diverse audiences with varying degrees of experience with the composer’s music. Only Wagner’s “best thoughts,” he explained, “…are presented, while all those parts are omitted which a mixed audience finds monotonous, although a connoisseur finds even here something to interest him, in details of harmonization and instrumentation. Furthermore, he argued that the excerpts could help one first acclimatize to the composer’s music without the distraction of the stage action, although this feeling is outgrown as one becomes more acquainted with the work. As he observed, “In listening to some of the most inspired passages…the hearer is so overwhelmed by the richness

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93 See note 87.
95 Finck, Wagner handbook, 48.
and grandeur of the music that he feels as if it were enough in itself, and everything else—action and scenery—an intrusion. This feeling passes away when the whole work becomes more familiar[.]” Ultimately, Wagner’s music was of sufficiently high quality that Finck concluded that it can succeed in the concert setting, and thus, he could see no good reason to cease the practice of performing excerpts from the composer’s operas: “[W]hat is of importance to remember”, he asserted, “[is] that Wagner’s music, even if it loses some of its effect in the concert hall, is yet, when at its best, equal to the finest work written by other masters especially for the concert hall.”

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As the above discussion shows, Thomas’s 1882 May Festival and 1884 Wagner Festival were significant in bringing the Ring’s music to thousands of Americans when the cycle had yet to be properly mounted on stage. But even after the operas were introduced and performed consistently at New York’s Metropolitan House during the late 1880s, the dissemination of excerpts persisted with considerable strength, and not only in orchestral concerts. Among the other ways the Ring’s music reached Americans was through the organ recital. During the 1860s, organs were being installed in concert halls as well as churches, particularly in the New England area. The instruments themselves had undergone significant technological advancement; as Barbara Owen describes, the adoption of equal temperament around 1850 made more feasible the playing of orchestral transcriptions, then beginning to interest organists, for many orchestral works were in remote keys that were disagreeable in the old meantone tuning. The planning of transcriptions, in turn, encouraged orchestral writing, and both demanded an organ of greater tonal variety as well as power.97

These developments therefore enabled organists to perform arrangements of orchestral excerpts from Wagner’s works, which many were keen to feature on their recital programs. One of the best known interpreters of the period was Benjamin Johnson (B.J.) Lang, the Bostonian organist and Wagner advocate, who became renowned for performing his own transcriptions of

excerpts from the composer’s operas in his solo recitals. Much like Thomas, he sought to create concerts that both entertained and enlightened his audiences, and he firmly believed Wagner’s music helped him achieve this. Later in the early twentieth century, the English-born organist Edwin H. Lemare (1866–1934) became well-known in the United States for creating and performing numerous organ transcriptions of orchestral works, including five excerpts from the Ring cycle. According to my examination of these scores, Lemare’s transcriptions contain, for the most part, the equivalent musical material as Wagner’s own arrangements, thereby reinforcing what was already being performed in orchestra concerts.

Perhaps even more influential than public orchestral concerts and solo recitals in the dissemination of the music of the Ring cycle were the remarkable variety of arrangements of excerpts from the operas that were made available to the domestic market in the late nineteenth century. According to Matthew Blackmar’s intriguing investigation on the publication and reception of piano scores and arrangements of Wagner’s music, 54 based on the music from the operas of the Ring were already available for purchase and at-home-play (in Europe and possibly in the U.S. too) during the fifteen years leading up to the 1876 Bayreuth Festival. The 1887 catalogue of music publishers B. Schott Söhne shows that the number of arrangements on the Ring cycle had expanded substantially since the inaugural Festival (see Appendix B).

That so many of them were eventually published might have had something to do with Wagner

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98 See the entry by Steven Ledbetter for “Lang, B(enjamin) (Johnson)” in Grove Music Online. Scrapbooks containing Lang’s recital programs from 1861 to 1909 are held at the Boston Public Library.
100 See Richard Wagner, Das Rheingold: Walhall Scene, transcribed for the organ by Edwin H. Lemare (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1906); similarly, Die Walküre: Der Ritt der Walküren, (n.d.); Die Walküre: Wotan’s Abschied und Feuerzauber (1905); Siegfried: Waldweben (n.d.); and Göttterdammerung: Trauermarsch beim Tode Siegfried’s (1905).
102 Verzeichnis des Musikalien—Verlags von B. Schott’s Söhne in Mainz. Alphabetisch geordnet und vollständig bis Ende 1886 (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1887), 797–802.
giving Schott permission in the early 1860s to print such transcriptions, because they did not sound anything like the orchestral scores of his operas, while helping to stimulate interest for live performances of his works.103 While some of these pieces were probably quite similar to the content of the orchestral excerpts, there were others in which the music was more freely adapted, such as those with titles like “Revue mélodique”, “Potpourri”, “Tonstücke”, “Episode”, “Paraphrase”, “Fantasie”, and “Musikalische Bilder”.

These published arrangements were typically for solo piano, voice and piano, piano duets and quartets (4 hands and 8 hands), duos for solo instrument (e.g. violin, viola, cello, flute) and piano, and chamber ensembles of four to five musicians, but by far the most common were for solo piano. There were even simplified versions for “young” pianists. This is not surprising since the piano was the favored instrument of middle-class households in Europe and the North America at the time. However, as Thomas Christensen has pointed out, 4-hand piano transcriptions were likely more commercially viable; amateur pianists preferred playing them, since they tended to be less difficult than solo piano arrangements while being more musically satisfying, because they contained more parts from the orchestral score. Such arrangements, he noted, “made acoustically accessible a repertory to which most musicians had only access in live performance,” before the advent of recording and radio technology.104 Notably, advocates of the piano transcription believed in their educative value: as a medium to prepare for attending live performances, to familiarize oneself with the details of a large-scale work which might be too complex or taxing to absorb in a single hearing, and to help relive or remember previous performances. Music journalists too relied on them, to help them construct their reviews. Even if such arrangements were criticized for being pale versions of the real thing, many thought that in

103 As he wrote to Franz Schott on 8 Jan 1863 regarding Carl Tausig’s piano arrangements of “The Ride of the Valkyries” and “Sieg mund’s Spring Song”, “I have nothing against their publication. They have really nothing to do with my actual compositions and come under the head of transcriptions and fantasies.” See LRW, 168–69. In striking contrast, Wagner battled with Schott to prevent the publication of the orchestral excerpts from the Ring that he conducted in concerts between 1862 and 1875.

this format, the broad dissemination of musical masterpieces, such as Wagner’s *Ring* operas, would help elevate public taste.\textsuperscript{105}

**John Philip Sousa and the Music of Wagner’s *Ring* for Concert Band**

During the 1890s and early 1900s, Wagner’s *Ring* excerpts reached yet another zenith in their popularization within the United States, this time as arrangements for concert band, the most famous of which was conducted by the “March King”, John Philip Sousa (1854–1932).\textsuperscript{106} Founded in 1892 in New York City, Sousa’s band became the leading concert band in the United States; over the next forty years, it gave more than 15,200 performances throughout America, as well as in Europe, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. In the U.S. especially, the band made numerous and extensive tours across the country, often travelling from coast-to-coast, while making stops not just in the key urban centers but in smaller cities and towns. They performed in all types of venues, from food fairs and expositions to concert halls and opera houses, and in general, became exceedingly popular with all classes of Americans. The band owed much of its success to Sousa being highly attuned to his public’s tastes, and his method of programming, combining popular repertoire (dance music, marches, etc.) with more serious art works (opera excerpts, orchestral overtures), which effectively drew large and inclusive audiences.

\textsuperscript{105} Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it would be worthwhile to compare available 4-hand transcriptions of excerpts from the *Ring* operas to the original orchestral score, in order to better assess their quality as mediums of reception.

Sousa’s band was the first to truly popularize most of the known orchestral selections from Wagner’s operas, including those from the Ring cycle, in concert band arrangements.\footnote{Only Patrick Gilmore’s band, the 22nd Regiment of New York, preceded Sousa in presenting Wagner excerpts. Active in the 1870s and 1880s, several Wagner excerpts were part of the band’s repertory often performed at Gilmore’s Garden concerts in Central Park. These included: the Faust Overture; a “Grosses Divertissement” from Die Meistersinger; “Vorspiel” from Tristan und Isolde; the “Third Finale” from Rienzi; a Rienzi Fantasia; “Selection” from The Flying Dutchman; Tannhäuser Overture; “Selection from Lohengrin; “Prelude” to Lohengrin; and “Siegfried’s Death from Götterdämmerung. See Appendix in Norman Albert Goldberg’s “A History of Band in the United States since 1860” (M.M. thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1942).} This was, in part, related to the unique features of the ensemble. Whereas American bands at the time were predominantly military or amateur brass bands, Sousa’s followed the European model of incorporating woodwinds and brass instruments in a balanced arrangement so that it imitated an orchestra (i.e. the winds taking on the string parts). Comprised of an average of sixty musicians, the band was about the same size as an orchestra of the period (such the Theodore Thomas Orchestra), but was easier to mobilize for touring purposes, and therefore, could reach greater numbers of Americans. Sousa also preferred to hire orchestral, not band, musicians. For one, they were likely to be already familiar with the music, since most of the concert band repertory at the time was comprised chiefly of arrangements of orchestral and operatic works. Moreover, their technical ability and professionalism tended to be the better than most, thus enabling them to play more complex music, such as by Wagner, at a high standard.

Sousa himself greatly admired Wagner and his operas (on his first ever trip to Europe in 1892, he saw Act I of Tannhäuser at the Bayreuth Festival). He began incorporating excerpts from Wagner’s operas into the band repertoire when he became director of the U.S. Marine Band in Washington D.C. Shocked to discover that the Band’s library contained “not a sheet of Wagner, Berlioz, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, or any other of the modern composers who were attracting attention throughout the musical world,” he set about organizing their first permanent music collection, in which Wagner became one of the most frequently represented composers.\footnote{See Chapter 5 of Patrick Warfield’s illuminating examination of Sousa’s early career, Making the} Initially, the excerpts the band performed were predominantly from the

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Note: The text is inverted in the image, but the natural form is provided above. The footnote references are included for context and further reading.
composer’s earlier works: *Tannhäuser*, *Rienzi*, *Lohengrin*, and *Der fliegende Holländer*.

However, when Sousa formed his eponymous band in 1892, arrangements from Wagner’s later works, including the *Ring* operas, became a significant part of his band’s repertory.

In programming Wagner excerpts in his concerts, Sousa sought to advance American appreciation for the composer’s music. In his opinion, Wagner’s works had the qualities of greatness that necessitated the winning of converts:

> If I were sent forth to educate a brand-new public in music, my text-book would be Wagner. As a musical dramatic he is easily the giant figure in the composer’s group, and as the drama vivifies and condenses the story into an easily assimilated tabloid of time, so Wagner’s works are works for the missionary.¹⁰⁹

Still, Sousa believed that entertaining, rather than educating, audiences was a better route to disseminating Wagner’s music to the mass American public. In this vein, he sought to distinguish himself from Theodore Thomas. As he articulated,

> Thomas had a highly organized symphony orchestra with a traditional instrumentation; I had a highly organized wind band with an instrumentation without precedent. Each of us was reaching an end, but through different methods. He gave Wagner, Liszt, and Tchaikovsky, in the belief that he was educating his public; I gave Wagner, Liszt and Tchaikovsky with the hope that I was entertaining my public.¹¹⁰

It was this goal of entertaining audiences that Sousa claimed as his evidence that military bands—and implicitly, his band—was more successful and influential than any other type of ensemble in expanding the American audience for Wagner’s music:

> Through the influence of military bands, Wagner is less of a myth to the people at large than Shakespeare, and his musical compositions are better known than the creations of the great poet. And this educational process, this enlightenment, this supplying the masses with musical pabulum, has been almost entirely accomplished by the efforts of the military band.¹¹¹

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¹¹¹ Op cit., 35–36. Sousa’s band was not the only ensemble of that type to perform transcribed excerpts from Wagner’s operas; for a history on American bands between 1865 and 1929, see Christine Condaris, “The Band Business in the United States Between the Civil War and the Great Depression” (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, Connecticut, 1987).
Although a detailed assessment of the impact of Sousa’s band on the performance and reception of Wagner’s music in the United States is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is likely that the ensemble’s reach in popularizing the Nibelungen excerpts to Americans was even greater than Thomas’s orchestra in the 1880s. Appendix C.1, which summarizes the arrangements that appeared in the band’s concerts between 1893 and 1927, and the various venues in which they were performed in New York, Chicago, and Boston, offers a glimpse of the frequent extent Sousa’s programs included selections from the Ring, and the diverse audiences they reached. The band embarked on up to three tours a year, each usually lasting three months at a time. Occasionally, there was an extended trip, such as the six-month tour of the United States from December 27, 1896 to June 14, 1897, for which the “Magic Fire Music”, the “Ride of the Valkyries”, and “Selections” from Siegfried were given especially frequently.

Sousa’s ensemble travelled far and wide on this excursion, covering nearly the entire span of the country (i.e. from Boston down to Jacksonville, FL, across to New Orleans all the way to Los Angeles, then north to Seattle, and back across to the East Coast) and venturing also into Canada (Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City, and Fredericton). Over the next two decades, the band continued to undertake a similar type of cross-country tour at least once a year.

An analysis of the extant arrangements and adaptations of the Ring’s music by Sousa, as well as transcriptions in other hands that were performed by the band, reveal that specific excerpts from the cycle’s operas are, for the most part, equivalent to the orchestral versions (see Appendix C.2).112 This is not surprising, since Sousa himself selected the orchestral arrangements he used (the quality of which he was quite particular) and altered them to suit his band’s instrumentation. However, it appears these transcriptions were less often performed than what Paul Bierley has identified as “selections” from the operas, which probably included the

112 The scores and parts to these transcriptions are currently held at the Sousa Archives and the Center for American Music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Sousa’s technique in transcribing orchestral compositions for band instrumentation is analyzed in Jonathan N. Korzun’s “The Orchestral Transcriptions for the Band of John Philip Sousa: A Description and Analysis” (DEd dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1994).
medley-like arrangements woven from key musical moments of each drama, such as those created by Arthur Seidel (1849–1910).\textsuperscript{113}

It is worth noting that the Wagner excerpts programmed by Sousa for his band concerts were not always received well. Some critics felt the composer’s works were too highbrow for a popular band concert. To address concerns of this type, Sousa learned to shrewdly adapt the structure of his programs, according to where and to what kind of audience his band was performing. While he did not necessarily change the type of repertory (i.e. the proportion of art music vs. popular music) his band played to suit the venue and its audience—to him, Wagner’s music was just as suitable for a fairground concert as in the concert hall—he did strategically alter the context of their presentation. Thus, a Wagner extract, for example, would be followed by some familiar and entertaining encore, to help sustain interest. This mixture in the programming seemed to have attracted broad audiences; contemporary newspaper reports indicate that droves of Americans often attended Sousa band concerts (many of which featured the music of Wagner), sometimes averaging 60,000 a week.

On the other hand, some critics thought that the medium of the concert band cheapened Wagner’s music. The reporter for the \textit{Chicago Daily News} felt this way about an 1896 concert that featured excerpts from \textit{Siegfried}. As he wrote,

\begin{quote}
When Mr. Sousa begins to take himself and his superb band serious[ly] enough to attempt “Siegfried” he goes into the hand-organ business. “Siegfried” is the essence of all that is celestial, delicate and supernatural—even voices disturb its exquisite loveliness—and to turn the brass tide of a marine band loose upon its threads of lace and gold is to tear it to pitiful tatters.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

Eventually, it appears that these skeptics came to accept the performance of Wagner excerpts by Sousa’s band, not least because of the ensemble’s exceptionally high standard of playing.

\textsuperscript{113} Bierley did not specifically indicate what was referred to as “Selections” from each of the operas of the \textit{Ring} so it is not clear whether what was performed in concert was a series of individual excerpts from the opera or one of the more freely adapted “medleys”.

\textsuperscript{114} “John Philip Sousa’s Band,” \textit{Chicago Daily News}, 30 Jan 1896; clipping found in the Sousa Band Press Books of the Paul E. Bierley Papers held at the Sousa Archives and the Center for American Music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
Even the above mentioned Chicago critic noted that “the work of Sousa’s band was so admirable, [however], that nothing more than the grotesque was reached and the sacrilege slipped away unheard.” Moreover, they witnessed the positive response of audiences who had otherwise not expected to hear Wagner’s music on a popular Sousa program. As the reviewer for the *Portland Oregonian* observed at an 1899 concert that included excerpts from *Parsifal* and *Götterdämmerung*:

A notable feature of the concert was the cordial reception given Wagner’s music. The grand scene from “Parsifal” brought a hearty encore, and the only request number of the evening was “Siegfried’s Death” from “Die Götterdämmerung.” None of the numbers on the programme was listened to with more breathless attraction than these. One thing is certain, if anyone can popularize Wagner, Sousa with his band of 50 men is the one to do it. The big audience seemed to appreciate the fact that the most work of the evening was done in these numbers. [...]The weird and awful struggle with the death sounded in Siegfried’s number with its low wail of sorrow at the close moved the audience no less.

Evidently, the successful popularization by Sousa’s band of Wagner’s music had much to do with Sousa capitalizing on the prevailing tastes of American middle-class audiences at the time, which, according to Neil Harris, “was growing progressively more knowledgeable and even experimental about its music, but which continued to enjoy popular works that made few demands on patience or understanding.”

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Despite his unparalleled efforts in disseminating Wagner’s music to Americans through orchestral concerts during the late nineteenth century, Theodore Thomas never had the opportunity he would have liked to conduct a fullystaged production. When the Metropolitan Opera House in New York underwent its first transformation into a German opera house in 1884, Thomas was passed over by its board of directors, first, for Leopold Damrosch, and after Damrosch’s sudden death in 1885, for Anton Seidl. With his reputation as Wagner’s celebrated

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115 Ibid.
protégé, along with his musical skill and charisma, Seidl soon eclipsed Thomas as the preeminent Wagnerian conductor in America, directing nearly every single opera by the composer, including the complete *Ring* cycle, on New York’s newest operatic stage. Thomas, for his part, eventually ventured on to Chicago, where he found late-career success in establishing the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which he conducted until his death in 1905. In the end, Thomas could not help but credit himself for having paved the way for Seidl’s later achievements with Wagner opera in the United States, and he remembered with special pride the triumph of his 1884 all-Wagner Festival. In his autobiography, Thomas for posterity recorded this thought about the 1884 performances as a springboard: “The seasons of German opera, which were inaugurated the following year [1884–1885] in the Metropolitan Opera House, was due to the success of these concerts.”

\[118\] TMA 1, 94–95.
CHAPTER IV: From the Festspielhaus to the Metropolitan Opera House:
Anton Seidl and the Ring Cycle

“None of the other conductors have such a clear understanding of my tempi, and the harmony between the music and the action. I have coached Seidl personally, and he will conduct your “Nibelungen” as no other can.”

--Letter from Wagner to Angelo Neumann, 27 Sep 1878

The early history of Wagner’s Ring cycle in the United States is bound up with the founding and establishment of New York’s Metropolitan Opera House and its resident companies in the late nineteenth century. The stockholders who had financed the building had intended for it to rival the Academy of Music in terms of standards of opera performance and social and cultural cachet. The 1883 inaugural season, however, ended in financial failure, due in part to the competition for artistic resources (in particular, singers and scenery) as a result of the repertoire being very similar to the Academy’s (i.e. mostly Italian and French operatic works). To ensure the Metropolitan continued to remain in operation, it had to differentiate itself from the Academy; thus, the decision was made to make it a theatre devoted exclusively to the performance of German-language opera. The outcome was remarkably transformative for the operatic culture of New York, and ultimately, the United States. Not only did it help German-language opera receive unprecedented exposure beyond the immigrant communities of the city, but for the first time, it facilitated consistent, fully-staged performances of many of Wagner’s operas. By 1884, the goals of the social and the musical elite in New York had aligned to guarantee the mutual success of the Metropolitan Opera House and of Wagner’s operas with American audiences. This social and cultural context which forms the foundation for the early performance history of the Ring cycle in the United States is examined in the first part of this chapter.

These circumstances ultimately enticed the Hungarian conductor and Wagner protégé Anton Seidl to immigrate to America and assume the role of music director at the Metropolitan Opera House. Following the untimely death of Leopold Damrosch who had led the first season

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of German opera there, Seidl conducted six more such seasons until 1891, during which Wagner’s operas became part of the core repertory performed. Edmund Stanton, then the resident company’s manager, was unlikely to have found someone of better Wagnerian pedigree to lead these American performances, especially of the Ring operas. By the time he arrived in New York in 1885, Seidl had already helped Wagner prepare for the premieres of the Ring and Parsifal at the 1876 and 1882 Bayreuth Festivals, assisted in the first stagings of the cycle in Leipzig and Berlin, and had just completed a ten-month tour conducting the Ring all over Europe with Angelo Neumann’s “Travelling Wagner Theater”. All this experience he channeled into the American presentations of the cycle’s operas, which he conducted many times individually, as well as having led the American premiere of the entire cycle in 1889, and touring performances to other American cities. In the latter part of this chapter, I examine Seidl’s scenic notebook documenting the 1876 rehearsals from before the cycle’s Bayreuth premiere; the first complete transcription and translation of the notebook accompanies this analysis. As one of several extant sources on the cycle’s first production, Seidl’s notebook is an important record of the conductor’s specific involvement in its realization. Furthermore, the notebook illuminates the scope of Seidl’s expertise on the Ring’s music and staging that he brought to the American performances of the cycle’s operas.

Part I: New York as Hub: Wagner Opera at the Metropolitan Opera House

The Founding and Establishment of the Metropolitan Opera House

The initial founding and establishment of the Metropolitan Opera arose as the result of a confluence of social factors affecting New York’s operatic scene during the late 1870s and early 1880s. By this time, the city had become, as John Koegel has aptly described, the “most

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3 There are many available histories of the Metropolitan Opera but only a few discuss the “German seasons” in detail.
polyglot and diverse...in the world for opera and other forms of musical theater.” German operettas were performed in German and English in German- and Anglo-American stages; French grand opera, opéra comique, and opéra bouffe were given in multiple languages; Italian opera was popular among different social classes; and major German operas by Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, and Wagner were performed at the larger houses in German and Italian. At the time, opera’s social center was the Academy of Music, where the city’s wealthy elite congregated for performances of the Italian repertory, and on occasion, Wagner’s works. Part of this upper-class audience consisted of families of long-established fortune, but following the Civil War, a new group of millionaires, whose affluence was attained through various railroading, banking, or real estate enterprises, were in ascendency. They were keen to join the “old money Knickerbockers” at the opera house in displaying their social eminence. As a result, the demand for boxes at the Academy rose but their limited number, coupled with the exclusionary attitudes of the Old Wealth, made it hard for the New Wealth to gain access, even if the latter were willing to pay as high as $30,000 per box for a single season. Determined to achieve proper social recognition, and disgruntled at being prevented from doing so at the Academy, various members of the *nouveaux riches*, which initially included, among others, William H., William K., and Cornelius Vanderbilt, James A. Roosevelt, Robert Goelet, and John Jacob Astor, decided to take matters into their own hands by banding together to found and build a new opera house.

There was perhaps no better testament of the New Wealth’s social agenda than the design of their Metropolitan Opera House, which was completed in early 1883, the year of Wagner’s death. Situated between 39th and 40th Streets, at the corner of Broadway and

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Seventh Avenue, it was then the nation’s largest theatre. Its architect, Josiah Cleveland Cady, who had no previous experience creating theatrical venues, had evidently opted, in his conception of the interior, to fulfill the desires of the building’s investors, rather than address the practicalities of staging grand opera. While the house lacked good acoustics, adequate sightlines, a proper backstage area, and sufficient stage machinery, it did have a vast, five-tiered, horseshoe-shaped auditorium that could accommodate 3,045 people, 732 of whom could occupy no less than 122 boxes (by comparison, the Academy only had fourteen). A proportion of these went to the initial shareholders of the house, who were each guaranteed one or more boxes according to their investment. The total cost of the Metropolitan Opera House came to just over $1.7 million.

While the resident companies at the Metropolitan Opera of the late nineteenth century may be regarded by historians as the ancestors of the present-day institution, the administrative arrangement between a theatre and an opera company was quite different at that time. During this period, the Metropolitan Opera House operated on what Paul DiMaggio has defined as the “guarantee model”. Essentially, the stockholders and their elected officials who owned the theatre were responsible for managing the administrative and financial aspects of the property, and they leased the space to impresarios and their companies to produce and present operas. If a profit was made by the opera company during the season, the impresarios would pay the

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5 The new opera house was initially supposed to be built on Madison Avenue, between 43rd and 44th Streets, but the original deeds to this plot of land did not allow for a theatre to be built there, thus the relocation.

6 Cady was best known for building a number of churches in the city, as well as the American Museum of Natural History. To build the Metropolitan Opera House, Cady was probably aided by the architect Louis de Coppet Bergh, who had furnished Cady with the designs of European opera houses as models; see Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1908, 9–12. The resultant design was most often compared by critics to Covent Garden in London; for example, see New York Times, 22 Jul 1883, 9.

7 In his study, Eisler tracks the financial details concerning the building of the Metropolitan Opera House as reported in the New York Times on 7 Apr 1880, 5; 8 Apr 1880, 5; 14 Mar 1882, 1, and 28 Mar 1882, 8. See also Martin Mayer’s discussion in The Met: One Hundred Years of Grandeur (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 13–23.

8 See his analysis of the evolution of the Metropolitan Opera, from its operations based on the “guarantee model” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the “non-profit model” (i.e. “high culture model”) established in the 1930s, in “Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Cultural Model to Theater, Opera, and the Dance, 1900–1940, in Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality, ed. Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21–57.
proprietors; if no profit resulted, the stockholders would cover the outstanding costs (i.e. increase their guarantees). The separation between house and company was intended to mitigate the high financial risk of presenting grand opera. In maintaining this organizational distinction, the opera companies resident at the theatre were not known as the “Metropolitan Opera Company” but were named after their respective directors, such as the “Abbey Italian Opera Company”, the “Damrosch German Opera Company”, the “Stanton German Opera Company”, and so on, as was the common practice of the time. Yet, unlike the Academy of Music which hosted multiple opera troupes and their impresarios each year, the premises of the Metropolitan Opera House, for the most part, was leased only to one resident company for a single, lengthy season (out of season, the theatre usually hosted various soloists and ensembles for concerts.) When the Metropolitan’s resident companies toured to other American cities, they were publicized in advertisements and programs as directly connected with the house itself; for instance, as the “Stanton German Opera Company from the Metropolitan Opera House of New York”. Ultimately, in the public eye, a strong association developed between the Metropolitan Opera and its resident companies, though they functioned technically as separate entities. As would become apparent later, this semblance of a unified organization between the house and its companies somewhat affected the perceptions of the early American performances of Wagner’s Ring cycle, not as the endeavor of a particular impresario and his opera company, but as a “house” product.

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9 According to Eisler, this was due in part to the reluctance of the stockholders to appear that they were directly associated with—and responsible for—the artistic matters of the companies when they did not intend to be. In the preface of his study, Eisler makes the decision to refer to all resident seasons at the Metropolitan Opera House as performed by the “Metropolitan Opera Company” even though in practice, the companies did not use this title. Most other historians acknowledge the distinction but still regard these separate companies as direct predecessors of the present-day Metropolitan Opera.

10 As John Dizikes wrote about the Academy of Music, “Impresarios came and went, nomadic groups of singers appeared on its stage for a few weeks and then returned to wherever they had come from.” In Opera in America: A Cultural History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 214. The Academy of Music also hosted concerts, political rallies, and other events. In contrast, the dedicated nature of the Metropolitan Opera House is evident in records of its performance history, such as the Annals.
Wagner Opera at the Metropolitan: The First Season, 1883–1884

The inaugural season of the Metropolitan Opera House was arranged to directly compete with the Academy of Music.\textsuperscript{11} To assemble the first resident troupe, the directors and stockholders had selected the American Henry E. Abbey (1846–1896), by then a well-known theatre impresario and manager of concert artists. Abbey, however, had little experience with running a company, so he invited the Austrian-American Maurice Grau (1849–1907), already a presenter of operetta and musical theatre, to be his business manager.\textsuperscript{12} Conscious of the relative success of the predominantly-Italian opera seasons under Colonel James Henry Mapleson at the Academy, Abbey likewise sought to present similar repertoire performed by the period’s leading star singers. In its first season, the “Abbey Italian Opera Company” gave over sixty performances of nearly twenty different operas, mainly Italian and French works (in Italian translation) with which opera-going Americans were already familiar, including \textit{Lucia di Lammermoor}, \textit{La Sonnambula}, \textit{Il Barbiere di Siviglia}, \textit{Faust}, \textit{Les Huguenots}, and \textit{La Prophète}. The sole novelty was the American premiere of Amilcare Ponchielli’s \textit{La Gioconda}.\textsuperscript{13} From Wagner’s works, only \textit{Lohengrin} was performed, and in Italian translation. Abbey’s decision to include this opera in his season was perhaps a ploy to intensify the competition between him and Mapleson, who had been instrumental in popularizing \textit{Lohengrin} at the Academy during the late 1870s and early 1880s. Indeed, by this time, the opera was better known sung in Italian than the original German in which it was premiered at the Neue Stadttheater in 1871. At the Metropolitan Opera, Abbey’s production featured in the title roles of Elsa and Lohengrin the Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson and tenor Italo Campanini, both of whom had starred in the

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\item The Metropolitan’s directors even chose to open the house on the same night as when the Academy opened its season, on 22 Oct 1883. For further discussion, see Eisler, \textit{Metropolitan Opera House, 1883–1908}, 21–35.
\item Abbey and Grau later reunited, along with John B. Schoeffel, to head the company at the Metropolitan Opera for the 1891–1892 season. After the fire destroyed the Metropolitan’s stage and auditorium in 1892, they resumed directorship of the company in the rebuilt house in the seasons from 1893 onwards. Following Abbey’s death in 1897, Grau assumed full leadership of the company in 1898 until 1903.
\item Further details about the first season at the Metropolitan Opera House are described in Ch. 2 of Eisler, \textit{Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1908}. The 1883–1884 season consisted of two parts: a regular season (22 Oct to 13 Jan) and a spring season (10 Mar to 12 Apr), with an east-coast/mid-west tour in between.
\end{itemize}
premiere of the Italian version at the Academy in 1874.

Perhaps as a sign of events to come, the first performance of the Italian *Lohengrin* at the Metropolitan Opera injected a small but not insignificant revitalizing spark into the critical discussion of Wagner’s music in some of New York’s prominent newspapers. The production overall was reviewed quite favorably by the critics of the *New York Times*, *Evening Post*, and the *Tribune*. The critic of the *Times* expressed, for instance, that it was a satisfactory representation in all respects, and was “worthy of the approval it received.” He also noted that it had been extraordinarily well-attended: “the audience was so numerous that the vast auditorium was actually crowded in all parts, with the exception of a few vacant seats in the first balcony.” The audience was appreciative as well, staying for the entire performance, and displaying “many manifestations of delight.” At face value, such comments about the number and type of responses of attendees are not unusual since critics had already been reporting fair-sized, relatively enthusiastic audiences for *Lohengrin* at the Academy for the last five years. However, the performance at the Metropolitan Opera appeared to have been attended by visibly larger numbers. Seeking to explain the phenomenon, the journalists of the *Evening Post* and the *Tribune* posited in their reviews that it was because Americans were at last truly captivated by Wagner and his music. The *Times*’s reporter though, was skeptical of this assessment, and wrote that:

The performance of “Lohengrin” at the Metropolitan Opera house has produced some very curious effects upon the ponderous intellects which feed the departments of musical criticism in some of the New York newspapers. Although the size of the audience on Wednesday night was not so much larger than it has been on other nights when Mme. Nilsson and Signor Campanini have sung, that an intelligent observer could fail to attribute the small increase, principally in the upper galleries, to the reduced prices, the two journals [the *Tribune* and *Evening Post*] which aim to give undue importance to anything in art that is German jump at the conclusion that it was the name of Wagner which drew the crowd.15

Yet, despite thinking his colleagues were overzealous in attributing the larger audience to the appeal of Wagner’s name or music, his observation that there was a “small increase, principally in the upper galleries,” suggests that there was indeed a growing middle class audience interested in seeing Wagner’s opera at the Academy, and were taking advantage of reduced ticket prices to do so.

Regardless of the specific reasons Americans were drawn to the performance, be it Wagner’s music, cheap ticket prices, or both, this publicized disagreement, though minor, marked the beginning of yet another significant shift in the New York press’s reception of the composer and his operas. As in the previous decade before the 1876 Bayreuth Festival, it began with a turnover of music critics working at the city’s major newspapers in the early 1880s. Notably, two strong advocates of Wagner’s music had taken the posts at the Tribune and the Evening Post in 1881—Henry Krehbiel and Henry T. Finck, respectively—and it is likely they were the subjects of the reprimand by the journalist of the Times.16 Who this was exactly is not known but another supporter of Wagner’s music, William James Henderson, later became that paper’s chief music critic around the mid-1880s.17 These three critics, among others, were the major arbiters in the American press of Wagner’s operas and their performance in the United States until the beginning of the next century. In particular, they would take up the Wagner cause as part of the process of “establishing the success and high prestige of German music in late-nineteenth-century American society”, as Karen Ahlquist has observed.18 Soon they would have much to discuss, for the time of Wagner’s operas in the United States, including the Ring cycle, had come at last.

16 For a list of major music critics during this period, see FP, 397–98.
17 It is not clear the exact start date of William J. Henderson’s tenure at the New York Times—Johnson cites 1883 but Ramona H. Matthew’s Grove Music Online biography of Henderson cites 1887. Henderson worked as the paper’s music critic until 1902.
**Becoming a “German” Opera House: The Metropolitan Opera Premiere of Die Walküre**

Following Abbey’s inaugural season, the Metropolitan Opera was rapidly transformed into a German opera house. As various historians have documented, the transition was neither simple nor smooth, and it bears highlighting here the major extent to which financial matters contributed to this change. While Abbey’s company was quite credible artistically, it was a financial disaster. At the end of the season, Abbey posted a deficit of approximately $500,000, incurred from the New York performances and the two tours his company made. The debt was due, in part, to the expensive new scenery and costumes, as well as the high fees of star singers such as Nilsson and Campanini, which Abbey had to pay in order to lure them away from Mapleson at the Academy. Moreover, while ticket prices were equal to the Academy’s, between $3 and $6 for a single seat, the repertoire was not substantially different enough to consistently draw full houses. To be sure, Mapleson also suffered similar artistic and financial losses during the 1883–1884 season as a result of competition with Abbey.  

According to their contract with Abbey, the Metropolitan’s directors had agreed to guarantee up to $60,000 against the debt but the rest, which still amounted to an exorbitant sum, was the impresario’s responsibility. The issue, however, did not prevent them from initially offering Abbey a second season at the Metropolitan Opera but not surprisingly, he told them he would only accept if the directors would agree to pay off the remainder of the deficit, in exchange for his giving up his salary. These terms, in the end, were too risky for them (they were also saddled with a $240,000 mortgage deficit on the building) and they began to pursue other options, including a possible (but unfavorable) merger with the Academy of Music, while hoping that Abbey would reconsider. For a while, they attempted to woo Ernest Gye, who managed the Royal Italian Opera Company at London’s Covent Garden. Gye, like Abbey, was

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19 Different sources have cited different amounts for Abbey’s deficit: DiMaggio puts the loss at $500,000 (“Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change,” 33), while Kolodin believes it to be at $600,000.  
20 For further discussion on the Metropolitan Opera/Academy of Music rivalry between 1883 until 1886 (particularly from the perspective of Mapleson’s activities at the older theatre), see John Frederick Cone’s study, *First Rival of the Metropolitan Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
also reluctant to stage a full season at his own expense without promise of a guarantee against losses. Having partnered with Mapleson in managing opera troupes on both sides of the Atlantic, he knew there would be fierce competition with the Academy for resources, and the cost for singers would be at a premium.

As a solution, Gye proposed that the Metropolitan Opera host a German opera company in the upcoming season, which would perform on alternate nights to the Italian troupe. Perhaps he saw a good opportunity to capitalize on the fresh surge of American interest in Wagner’s music, fueled, in part, by the composer’s death a year earlier, and the recent proliferation of Wagner concerts led by Thomas and Damrosch in New York and other U.S. cities.\textsuperscript{21} The Metropolitan’s directors, however, rejected Gye’s suggestion, claiming the unprofitability of German opera. “German opera,” the \textit{New York Times} reported them saying, “cannot be given at the same prices as Italian, and to have opera one night at $5 a seat and the next night at $3 was considered to be out of the question.”\textsuperscript{22} In other words, they thought such an arrangement was financially—and perhaps even socially—untenable. Further negotiations with Gye ultimately dissolved in late July 1884, and the Metropolitan Opera House still did not have a company for the upcoming season. However, sometime in early August, the conductor Leopold Damrosch approached the directors with a rather radical proposal.

Damrosch’s part in transforming the Metropolitan Opera into a German opera house demonstrates yet again the extent to which German musicians were a driving force behind establishing Wagner’s music in the United States. To the directors (among whom, it should be noted, there was no member of the German elite), he recommended a full-season of German-language opera in which Wagner’s works would form a chief part of the repertoire. Tickets to the performances would range from 50 cents to $3.00, about half of what was charged at the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21} As discussed, for example, in Ch. 3 of this dissertation.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{22} \textit{New York Times}, 6 Mar 1884, 5. Eisler and Kolodin further elucidate the complexity of the situation between Gye and the Metropolitan Opera in their respective accounts. See especially Eisler, \textit{Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1908}, 55–78.}
Academy.\textsuperscript{23} Initially, they responded with reticence; Damrosch was not an impresario with an independent source of financial support, nor did he own physical assets such as stage sets and scenery, and therefore, the costs of producing these operas could potentially be very high.\textsuperscript{24} To make the arrangements appear more palatable, Damrosch told them that production costs would probably be lower than for Italian opera, since German singers were less expensive than Italian ones, and that for his role as manager and conductor of the company, he would accept a salary of $10,000 but would not share in the profits or losses of the performances. He also emphasized that by becoming a German house, the Metropolitan would no longer be in direct competition with the Academy of Music for artistic resources. In the end, it was probably these latter considerations (and the lack of any other options) that convinced the directors to accept Damrosch’s scheme. On August 13, he was appointed new music director of the company.

The New York press responded to Damrosch’s appointment, and the upcoming German season, with strong support. A journalist for the \textit{New York Times} praised the Metropolitan’s board for selecting the popular German-American conductor, as he seemed “by far the best” suited for the position, on account of his direct connection to Liszt and Wagner, as well his conducting experience in Breslau.\textsuperscript{25} In reality, although Damrosch was regarded as an excellent symphonic and choral conductor, his competence with staged opera productions had yet to be fully tested. He had no more significant experience than his chief competitor, Theodore Thomas, and certainly less than Adolf Neuendorff, who had managed and worked in German theatres for years.\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, the media sought to highlight Damrosch’s Old World connections, which were deemed to have enabled the conductor to successfully secure a strong company of German artists, including those of Bayreuth renown. About these singers and stage technicians

\textsuperscript{24} The director George L. Rives, for example, told the \textit{New York Times} that he did not think the production costs of Wagner opera would be cheaper than for Italian opera since new sets would have to be created for all of them with the exception of \textit{Lohengrin}; \textit{New York Times}, 9 Sep 1884, 4.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{New York Times}, 17 Aug 1884, 6. Damrosch was previously the concertmaster of Liszt’s court orchestra in Weimar.
\textsuperscript{26} See Ch. 7 in George Martin’s \textit{The Damrosch Dynasty: America’s First Family of Music} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983).
to be imported to the Metropolitan Opera, critics diligently provided their career biographies so to acquaint the American public of the experience and superior abilities of these artists in interpreting the German repertory. But perhaps what is most significant about the media’s support for the prospective German season was its part in the rising tide of commentary at this time that deliberately endorsed German opera over Italian opera, the latter now seen as in decline. Already in the previous year, several pro-German music critics had proclaimed their desire for "adequate representation[s] of the great works of the German masters", which they defined as superior, "nobler than the sweetmeats of the hurdy-gurdy repertory." In the view of Damrosch’s son Walter, the Metropolitan’s first German season was the fulfillment of his father’s dream of introducing Wagner’s music-dramas to Americans and “to sweep away forever the artificial and shallow opera of the old Italian school with which Mapleson, Max Strakosh, and others had until then principally fed our public.”

In early October, the complete roster for the season was confirmed, including a 70-member chorus and Damrosch’s own New York Symphony as the orchestra. Several weeks later, on November 17, the first German season at the Metropolitan Opera opened with Tannhäuser. As expected, Wagner’s operas dominated the performance schedule. While Damrosch selected only three of them to be performed—Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, and Die Walküre—they constituted 25 presentations out of 59 total for the entire season. Of these, the most anticipated by the public was the Metropolitan premiere of Die Walküre on January 30, 1885, its first staging since the 1877 performances by the Fryer-Neuendorff company.

Damrosch was no doubt aware of the inadequacies of the earlier production, and he scrupulously sought to avoid them in his. Luckily, he was already much better equipped. For one, his cast was comprised of singers who had previously sung at Bayreuth under Wagner’s direction or worked with his protégé, Anton Seidl. Amalie Materna, who was already well-known

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28 Walter Damrosch, My Musical Life (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 53.
to Americans, reprised her role of Brünnhilde. Another Bayreuth veteran, Marianne Brandt, who performed the role of Waltraute in Götterdämmerung in 1876 and portrayed Kundry for the second performance of Parsifal in 1882, assumed the part of Fricka. The German tenor Anton Schott was Siegmund, the part he had took on under Seidl’s conductorship for the Italian leg of Neumann’s “Traveling Wagner Theatre” tour. Sieglinde was portrayed by Auguste Kraus (who was then newly married to Seidl); the Austrian baritone Joseph Staudigl and bass Joseph Kögel were Wotan and Hunding, respectively. To supervise the execution of the stage effects and scenery, Damrosch had brought in Wilhelm Hock, the stage director at the Hamburg Grand Opera. For his part, Damrosch meticulously prepared the orchestra, whose members were already accustomed to his leadership, and he ensured all components of the production were sufficiently rehearsed. Furthermore, instead of relying on assistants, he personally directed every rehearsal and conducted each performance.

Artistically, the results did not disappoint. Judging by the New York press reports following the opera’s first presentation, American critics and audiences seemed very satisfied with what they heard and saw. Among them, the critic for the New York Times commented that this performance was the “true” American premiere of the work as witnessed by thousands in the Metropolitan’s capacious auditorium:

Last night’s production of Die Walküre is to be regarded in fact as the earliest adequate attempt to convey a complete impression of the dramatic, lyric, and spectacular characteristics of Wagner’s drama. [...] Its shortcomings and defects were so few and insignificant that it may be referred with fairness as a perfect performance.29

The scenery and costumes were lauded for how accurately they reproduced the original 1876 Bayreuth production, and the interpretations of each singer were also praised in turn. But it was Damrosch and his orchestra whom the critics credited for the success of the endeavor.

According to the review in the Times:

The largest measure of praise belongs undoubtedly to Dr. Damrosch’s orchestra, whose energy never flagged, and whose proficiency was unimpeachable, and whose talent and

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enthusiasm enabled the listener to catch the finest shades of the composer’s music, as well as enjoy its most brilliant and powerful tone-pictures. To Dr. Damrosch, as the leader of the band, is to be ascribed, of course, no small part of its admirable condition, and when it is borne in mind that the conductor’s labors extended into every department of an opera house, it will be understood, too, that something more than a share of the praise bestowed upon the musicians falls to his lot.

While it is difficult to evaluate exactly how good this presentation of the opera was, the strength and consistency of critical praise suggests that the quality of the performance was unlike anything witnessed before.

*Die Walküre* was also a financial success for the Damrosch company. Thirteen presentations total of the opera were given, including six on the post-season tour to Chicago and Boston.30 All together, they brought in the largest box-office return per performance of any opera that season (the first presentation alone grossed $3,200), thus confirming the significant American interest in Wagner and the *Ring* cycle.31 Newspaper reports indicated that the audiences present were diverse in class and nationality (i.e. they were not exclusively or even predominantly German immigrants) and exhibited rapt attention during the performances. Damrosch’s scheme offering lower ticket prices was thus an incentive, not a deterrent, for Americans hungering to see *Die Walküre*, and in general, this rather novel abundance of Wagnerian opera.

Unfortunately, tragedy struck mid-season. After conducting four more presentations of *Die Walküre* following the premiere, Leopold Damrosch fell ill during a rehearsal with the Oratorio Society on February 10, and never recuperated; five days later, he died unexpectedly. His immense work schedule over the past year, encompassing his duties at the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Symphony, and various choral societies, was believed to be the main cause of his untimely death. The remaining eight performances of *Die Walküre* were conducted

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30 See records for the 1884–1885 season in *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera*.
31 As reported in the *New York Times*, 18 Feb 1885, 5. Joseph Horowitz has noted that this was because many of the seats had been purchased by speculators and resold for nearly twice what was paid; *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1994), 80.
by Leopold’s two assistants, the chorus master John Lund, and Damrosch’s son Walter, who was also appointed to finish the season and lead the company on their post-season tour.\textsuperscript{32}

The Metropolitan’s directors were now faced with the decision as to who should become Leopold’s successor. Walter was a possible contender but there was the matter of his age (he was then only twenty-three) and his lack of conducting experience, especially with Wagner’s works. The tenor Anton Schott did not think the young Damrosch was up to the task, and by way of response, submitted his own detailed proposal, which outlined his ideas in reorganizing the company under his own management. It soon became apparent that Schott had been devising his plans for some time, as a schism had already been developing between him and Leopold, which also divided the singers of the company.\textsuperscript{33} In the New York press, there was heavy speculation as to whether the directors would accept Schott’s proposal or whether the tenor would take his plans to the Academy of Music (it was rumored that their board wanted to establish a German opera company there to directly compete with the Metropolitan Opera).\textsuperscript{34} In the end, Schott remained with the Metropolitan’s company although he was not appointed to manage it. Even so, the directors adopted and carried out many elements of his initial proposal, perhaps the most significant of these being the engagement of the conductor Anton Seidl.

\textit{Anton Seidl Comes to New York}

Although Damrosch’s directorship at the Metropolitan was cut short by his sudden death, his management of the first German opera season had successfully convinced the

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{New York Times}, 21 Feb 1885, 4. Leopold Damrosch hired Lund because he was seeking an assistant conductor who had experience with Wagner’s operas. Born in Hamburg in 1859, Lund became the choir director of the Bremen Opera in 1880, and was subsequently promoted to assistant conductor in 1882, the year prior to Anton Seidl’s arrival in Bremen. The following year, Lund was the musical director for the Stettin (Szczecin) Opera Company, when Damrosch signed him as chorus master at the Metropolitan Opera. In 1887, Lund left New York to direct the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{New York Times}, 19 Feb 1885, 5. A schism between Leopold Damrosch and Schott had developed earlier in the season, which resulted in the singers Materna, Bely, Schlach, Robinson, Udvardi, Kögel, and Hock declaring their loyalty to Damrosch, while Blum, Staudigl, Kraus, Brandt and several others sided with Schott.

\textsuperscript{34} The president of the Academy’s board, Herman R. LeRoy, strongly denied claims of being in negotiation with Schott; see the \textit{New York Times}, 20 Feb 1885, 5. This complex situation is elucidated in further detail in Eisler’s \textit{The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1908}, 112–22.
house’s directors that German grand opera, and notably, Wagner opera, could be produced and performed at a relatively high standard of artistry and be financially viable (“financially viable" meaning that the deficit incurred could be comfortably covered by the stockholders). Thus, to ensure that subsequent seasons were of similar, if not better quality, it made sense for them to hire a leading conductor of this repertory. While specific details of the process that led to Seidl’s appointment at the Metropolitan Opera remain unknown, it was most likely jumpstarted by Schott’s recommendation. During the 1884–1885 season, Seidl was conducting at the Bremen Court Opera, then under the management of Angelo Neumann, while his wife, Auguste Kraus, was in New York singing as a member of Damrosch’s company. According to Kraus, she had agreed to accept the engagement so she could scout out career opportunities for her husband:

My husband had dreamed so often about America that an irresistible power drew him towards that country, and he felt convinced that he would find there a fine opening for his work. […] My only reason for coming was to study the peculiarities of the country and see what chance my husband might have for a concert tour.

Following Damrosch’s death, Kraus sided with Schott in the rift between the company members, probably because the tenor was endorsing Seidl to succeed Leopold. Indeed, only five days after the tragedy, Schott already informed the New York Times that:

We propose to take German opera here as Wagner himself might, and in order to do so have secured Wagner’s only pupil Herr Seidl for conductor. Wagner taught him every detail of opera, and particularly the intricacies of his own work. Herr Seidl resided with Wagner for six years at Bayreuth, and is today Europe’s greatest interpreter of the dead master.

That Schott had already secured Seidl was an overstatement of the situation at this time, because a month later, the Times speculated that the Metropolitan’s directors planned to offer

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35 For example, the Damrosch company in the 1884–1885 season incurred only a $40,000 deficit compared to the $500,000 accrued by the Abbey company during the previous season.

36 As Schott later recalled, “I cannot refrain from expressing the pride I feel in having been instrumental in bringing Anton Seidl to America. Having been with him so long I knew his value, and after the death of Dr. Leopold Damrosch I kept recommending him as the one man to appoint in his place. He was consequently engaged and brought over.” In Anton Seidl: A Memorial by His Friends, ed. Henry T. Finck (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 255.


38 20 Feb 1885, 5.
the position to Hans Richter. In a subsequent interview with the press, Edmund Stanton, the secretary of the board now appointed managing director of the company, confirmed that Richter was eager to come to New York. As it turned out, Richter was unable to accept the offer, and Seidl was therefore engaged, as the New York papers confirmed in mid-July. Although he was younger than Richter (he was thirty-five to the latter’s forty-two years), Seidl’s musical abilities and his familiarity with Wagner’s works and aesthetic approach were touted by Stanton to fill the position successfully:

In place of Richter I secured Herr Seidl, who is a younger man, and, of course, has not had the experience of Richter. But he is an excellent conductor and stands very high in Germany. He...was an intimate friend and protégé of Wagner, with whose music and methods he is thoroughly familiar.

Seidl, in turn, was thrilled to move to New York; as his wife recalled:

I am still convinced that a mysterious attraction drew him to New York, for the moment he saw the harbor he was delighted; the elevated railroad he found imposing; even the large telegraph poles seemed to him beautiful. We were still in the carriage when he exclaimed: “This is magnificent! I feel that I shall get along well here.” When he saw the big Opera House he was delighted with his future sphere of activity. He was enchanted also with the idea of being the first to introduce in New York the great works of his master—to make them acquainted with the Meistersinger, Rheingold, Siegfried, Götterdämmerung, and Tristan.

Thus began Seidl’s major tenure as conductor for the Metropolitan Opera, which extended for six seasons, from 1885 until 1891 (he later returned for the 1895–1896 and 1896–1897 seasons). With Edmund Stanton responsible for the administration of the company, Seidl could focus entirely on the musical direction. The troupe flourished under this arrangement, financially and artistically, and soon developed a national and international reputation as a leading presenter of German opera. As John Koegel has observed, the Metropolitan Opera House became the only place in New York at this time where Americans could see and hear

40 New York Times, 19 Jul 1885, 7. As to why Richter could not be engaged, Stanton told the paper that, “The Directors of the Imperial Opera House in Vienna...positively refused to give him a leave of absence. Richter has a very large family, and after serving another year, I believe, he would be entitled to a pension. [...] I couldn’t promise him any pension from the Metropolitan Opera House, and so the negotiations were abandoned.”
41 Finck, Anton Seidl, 29.
German grand opera. Meanwhile, a shift was also occurring in the upper-class social scene, in which the Academy aristocrats were gradually joining the New Wealth in supporting the latter’s opera house. This eventually led to the demise of the Academy, for it never recovered its former prestige as the ruling Italian opera house and locus of the city’s social elite. The press acknowledged the change as heralding the full establishment of German opera; as the writer, George W. Curtis, for Harper’s wrote in 1885, “for the first time, ‘German opera’ has not been an occasional and curious experiment on off evenings and with a chance-medley, but has been approved and accepted by ‘fashion’ and ‘the town.’”

With Seidl conducting, Wagner’s works, not surprisingly, continued to dominate the repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera House until 1891. Besides regularly performing the operas that had already been staged in earlier decades, Stanton’s company also mounted the American premieres of the rest of the composer’s major operas (with the exception of Parsifal): Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg in January 1886; Tristan und Isolde in December 1886; Siegfried in November 1887; Götterdämmerung in January 1888; Das Rheingold in January 1889; and finally, in March 1889, the first American staging of the complete Ring cycle. Of the Ring operas specifically, the Stanton company gave during the German seasons, a total of 19 individual performances of Die Walküre, 20 of Siegfried, 17 of Götterdämmerung, 9 of Das Rheingold, and 9 complete cycles in New York, as well as on tour to Philadelphia, Boston, Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis. In sum, no other troupe in the United States at this time performed Wagner’s operas as consistently and as often as they did.

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42 Major German-language venues of the 1880s and 1890s, such as the Thalia Theater and the Amberg Theater, staged mostly operettas, not grand opera; see his discussion in Ch. 4 of Music in German Immigrant Theater, 101–22.
43 See Cone’s First Rival of the Metropolitan Opera for further discussion, especially Chs. 14 to 17.
45 Stanton had apparently “acquired the sole right for the United States and Canada of the production of all of Wagner’s operas,” according to program books for the 1887–1889 seasons. This may have been true for Tristan und Isolde, Die Meistersinger, and the operas of the Ring, but other companies (such as the Theodore Thomas American Opera Company) did occasionally stage Lohengrin, and Die fliegende Holländers, albeit in Italian or English translation, during this period.
For the early American stagings of Wagner’s operas, Anton Seidl was a significant asset for Stanton’s company at the Metropolitan Opera. As Joseph Horowitz and others have already revealed, Seidl, as the composer’s closest disciple, brought to the American productions the interpretive skill and expertise that already made him one of the preeminent conductors of Wagner’s operas in Europe.\(^\text{46}\) For the Ring operas, it was due to Seidl’s authority with the cycle’s scores and his particular understanding of Wagner’s principle of integrating the stage action with the music that American audiences had the benefit of experiencing these operas as close as possible to the way the composer intended. The following discussion further elucidates Seidl’s specific association with the cycle, from its roots in Wagner’s theatrical world in Bayreuth, to the transference of this knowledge and experience to the early American performances of the operas.

**Part II: Anton Seidl and Wagner’s Ring Cycle**

*Heir to the Bayreuth Tradition: Anton Seidl (1850–1898)*

Seidl’s successful career as a chief inheritor of the composer’s legacy began with a period of intense immersion into the world of Wagner. Born in Budapest in 1850, he received his musical education at the Leipzig Conservatory in piano and composition, and afterwards, returned to his native city to study with Wagner’s protégé, Hans Richter, another Hungarian-born conductor.\(^\text{47}\) It was through Richter that Seidl encountered Wagner personally: in the early 1870s, Richter had become deeply involved in Wagner’s Bayreuth project and was slated by the composer to conduct the premiere of the Ring cycle. In 1872, Wagner wrote to Richter, requesting his recommendation for an assistant, to which Richter promptly responded that he hire the twenty-two-year-old Seidl. Almost instantly, Seidl was accepted by Wagner and his family as one of their own. Privately, he was a regular member of the household, present during


\(^{47}\) While exiled in Tribschen, Wagner employed Richter to copy the score of Die Meistersinger in 1866 and two years later, Richter assisted in that work’s premiere.
mealtimes and the family’s evening discussions and entertainments. Professionally, Wagner had initially employed him as a copyist and to organize his correspondence, but recognizing significant talent in the young Seidl, the composer soon involved him directly in many other artistic activities. Together, they studied the symphonic and operatic repertoire of other composers, as well as Wagner’s own works, frequently playing duet arrangements on the piano during the day and evening. Seidl also accompanied Wagner when the composer traveled to conduct concerts, thus giving the budding disciple ample opportunity to observe Wagner and to absorb his ideas and technique.

Of all that Seidl accomplished, perhaps his greatest contribution was his major role in the early performance history of the *Ring* cycle. In the years leading up to the 1876 Bayreuth Festival, Seidl was heavily involved in the preparation of the cycle’s premiere. He was a member of the “Nibelung Chancellery”, a group of young musicians headed by Hans Richter, who assisted the composer in copying parts and correcting proofs. Wagner also entrusted Seidl with coaching some of the principal singers and the Gibichung male chorus in the second act of *Götterdämmerung*. As further proof of his esteem of Seidl’s conducting abilities, Wagner designated him as Hans Richter’s replacement, should illness befall Richter during the performances. As Seidl recalled in an unpublished manuscript of an article describing his relationship with Wagner, “So übergab er Seidl eine Erklärung, als dieser nach Mannheim und Mainz als Dirigent berufen worde, dass er (Wagner), falls Richter in 1876 krank worden ware, keinen Augenblick gezögert hätte, Seidl die volle Direktion der Festspiele zu übertragen.”

After the 1876 Festival, Seidl was involved in various capacities with many other performances of the *Ring*, at theatres outside of Bayreuth. He advised Angelo Neumann (at Wagner’s urging) on the 1878 Leipzig performances, coached the singers for the 1879 Vienna production of the cycle,

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48 Along with Seidl, the “Nibelungen Kanzlei” included Franz Fischer (1849–1918); Joseph Rubenstein (1847–1884); Felix Mottl (1856–1911); Heinrich Porges (1837–1900); Hermann Zumpe (1850–1903); and Demetrius Lalas.

49 From Anton Seidl, “Wie Wagner selbst über Seidl dachte”, unpublished manuscript, held at the Seidl Archives, Box 3, Folder 18, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York. Seidl refers to himself in the third person in this excerpt.
and conducted the 1881 Berlin and 1882 London premieres of the *Ring* as well as presentations on Neumann’s pan-European tour.

Through his experience assisting Wagner on the Bayreuth *Ring* cycle, Seidl came to learn—and embody—the composer’s notion of the ideal conductor of opera; that is, one who “made it their business to understand the theatre—the opera—and to make themselves masters of the proper application of music to dramatic art,” as Wagner stated in his influential 1869 essay, *Über das Dirigiren (On Conducting)*.\(^{50}\) This kind of conductor comprehends the dramatic impulse of the music, in both the singing and the orchestra, and employs the flexible modification of tempi to achieve the appropriate phrasing and expression. Stemming from this principle, Wagner’s ideal conductor for his operas also grasps the vital relationship between the music and the stage action. It was in these particular aspects that the composer trained Seidl and ultimately, the way in which Seidl distinguished himself as a conductor of Wagner’s works.

In 1878, during Angelo Neumann’s preparations for the Leipzig premieres of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner sent Seidl with a letter to the impresario stating that (italics are mine for emphasis), he “recommends the honorable board of directors at the Leipzig theatre to pay special attention to the demands of Anton Seidl as to corrections with regard to the ensemble of the tableaux and the music, as he (R.W.) is unable to direct there personally.”\(^{51}\) Wagner later urged Neumann to hire Seidl at Leipzig because “None of the other conductors have such a clear understanding of my tempi, and the harmony between the music and the action. I have coached Seidl personally, and he will conduct your “Nibelungen” as no other can.”\(^{52}\)

Beyond Wagner’s written endorsements, one particular source illuminates Seidl’s involvement in the preparation for the *Ring* cycle’s premiere in Bayreuth, and testifies to how he

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\(^{50}\) Richard Wagner, *Über das Dirigiren* (Leipzig: 1869). The essay was originally published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and the *New Yorker Musik-Zeitung* in 1869. It was issued in book form later that year (Leipzig, 1869), and incorporated into Wagner’s collected writings, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dictungen von Richard Wagner* (Leipzig, 1871–1883). An English translation by Edward Dannreuther was published in 1887 as *On Conducting*, and is now in its fourth edition (London: William Reeves, 1940; repr. 1972).

\(^{51}\) Neumann, *Personal Recollections*, 77.

came to gain his authoritative understanding of the staging and music of its operas. During the rehearsals in the summer of 1876, Seidl recorded a series of notes in a pocket-sized book, detailing the coordination of the stage action with the music in various parts of the cycle. This “scenic notebook” is one of many extant sources that document the cycle’s rehearsal process, but it has not been examined in a comprehensive manner, until now. Here, for the first time, Seidl’s entire notebook is analyzed thoroughly, accompanied by a full transcription and translation of its contents. These annotations show the aspects for which Seidl was specifically responsible in the Ring’s 1876 staging, and reveal the significant extent to which Wagner entrusted him to carry out some of its most complex and sophisticated elements. This Regiebuch therefore offers a fascinating glimpse into Seidl’s early career and his engagement with the Ring cycle at a formative stage of its performance history.

**Seidl’s 1876 Scenic Notebook: Transcription and Analysis**

Anton Seidl compiled his “scenic notes” during the stage rehearsals of the Ring cycle beginning June 3, 1876, as indicated on the second page of his notebook; a transcription and translation of the entire book is provided in Appendix D. Compared to various eye-witness accounts (such as those by Heinrich Porges and Richard Fricke) and other working documents of the 1876 stage rehearsals (such as the annotated piano scores analyzed by Martina Srocke), Seidl’s notebook is quite distinctive. Whereas others had recorded the particularities of

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53 The original notebook is part of the Seidl Archives (Box 3, Folder 10) at the Rare Books and Manuscript Library at Columbia University, New York City.

54 Porges’s account was intended to be published for posterity, “so that a tradition goes in writing,” as Wagner had advised him; see Heinrich Porges, Wagner Rehearsing the Ring: An Eye-Witness Account of the Stage Rehearsals of the First Bayreuth Festival, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), viii. Fricke, however, had originally intended his diary to be read only by an intimate circle of family and close friends, but later revised it for publication and public consumption; see Richard Fricke, Wagner in Rehearsal, 1875–1876: The Diaries of Richard Fricke, trans. George R. Fricke, eds. James Deaville with Evan Baker (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1998), 25. Fricke’s diaries have also been translated by Stewart Spencer as “Bayreuth in 1876,” in Wagner Journal 11(1990): 93–109, 134–50; and Wagner Journal 12 (1991): 25–44. For further discussion on Fricke’s role in the production, see Evan Baker’s “The Assistant,” in Opera News 60 (13 April 1996): 34–37. Other published memoirs which include descriptions of the 1876 rehearsals include Carl Emil Doepler: A Memoir of Bayreuth 1876, ed. Peter Cook (London: Self-Publishing Association, 1979); and Julius Hey, Richard Wagner als Vortragsmeister (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911), and his essay “Wie Wagner mit seinem Siegfried probte,” printed in Neuen Deutsche Rundschau der Freien Bühne (1901). Martina Srocke examined the substantial number of notes made by
orchestral interpretation (e.g. dynamics, articulation, etc.), or singers’ characterization, movements and gestures, and vocal delivery, Seidl appeared to have been predominantly concerned with harmonizing certain aspects of the staging to the orchestral score.

While the exact purpose of the notebook cannot be wholly determined, several conclusions might be drawn from a general examination of its physical features and its contents. It is likely that the notebook was for Seidl’s personal use, and that he was directly involved in managing the aspects of staging specifically described therein. His notes are organized in performance order (i.e. by opera, and within each, by act and scene), and the pocket-sized dimensions of the book suggest that it was intended to be portable, so that Seidl could keep it on his person—perhaps at hand to use as a reference—during the 1876 rehearsals and performances.

The notebook contains 52 pages total, of which 9 are unfilled. The paper inside consists of unlined pages and pages with musical staves. Many of Seidl’s notes include musical cues—certain melodic lines or rhythmic patterns—from the orchestral score, around which he indicated various stage directions. Frequently, the sung text is provided as well. In general, Seidl’s annotations correlate with the stage directions that Wagner already provided in the printed score. On the rare occasion they deviated, it was usually for practical or interpretative reasons. For example, at the beginning of Das Rheingold, Seidl recorded that the curtain should go up—or in the case at the Festspielhaus, open—thirty measures earlier than what Wagner had indicated in his score (see p. 6 of the transcription). This alteration was made, presumably, to allow more time for Woglinde (portrayed by Lilli Lehmann) to be wheeled onto the stage in her various hands in piano scores during the 1876 rehearsals in Wagner als Regisseur (Munich: Musikverlag Emil Katzbichler, 1988). Srocke consulted Seidl’s notebook for her study but did not discuss its contents in detail. Katherine R. Syer has since analyzed several pages from the notebook in her article, “From Page to Stage”; see footnote 2. I am grateful for her encouragement to look at Seidl’s notebook more closely for this project.

55 As Heinrich Porges noted in his description of the 1876 rehearsals, the curtain at the Festspielhaus “is not raised as in other theatres; instead two curtains hanging side by side are sung back. This has the advantage that the stage picture, instead of appearing bit by bit, is revealed to our astonished eyes in a single instant.” In Wagner Rehearsing the ‘Ring’, 8.
swimming machine, before she delivers her opening line, “Weia! Waga!”

Taken as a whole, Seidl’s notebook reveals the practical application of Wagner’s principle of “deeds of music made visible” (“ersichtlich gewordene Taten der Musik”) in the coordination of music and drama in the Ring cycle.\(^{56}\) Notably, it shows the significant extent to which the young Seidl was groomed by the composer to grasp—and ultimately, embody—the notion, thus becoming Wagner’s ideal type of conductor for his works. In his own essay entitled “On Conducting” (an obvious tribute to Wagner’s 1869 similarly-named article), Seidl revealed how he came to understand and appreciate Wagner’s concept of Gesamtkunstwerk,

I learned to know the meaning of every phrase, every violin figure, every sixteenth note. I learned too, how it was possible with the help of the picture and action to transform an apparently insignificant violin passage into an incident, and to lift a simple horn call into a thing of stupendous significance by means of scenic emphasis. But, it will be urged, all this is indicated in the score; all that is necessary is to carry out the printed directions.\(^{57}\)

Seidl also keenly embraced Wagner’s idea of the conductor as a kind of “musical stage-manager”; as he stating in the same essay, the “most successful and effective conductor...is as thoroughly versed in the technical science of the stage as he is in music.”\(^{58}\) During the 1876 rehearsals of the Ring, he worked especially closely with Richard Fricke, the ballet-master whom Wagner had hired to choreograph the movements and gestures of the singers. One particular entry in Fricke’s diary points to Seidl’s involvement as a kind of “behind-the-scenes” director. On June 17–18, Fricke recorded that Wagner, who at the time was rather ill and suffering from “neuralgia in his face,” had requested the ballet-master go with him to rehearsal and “sit beside me and be my interpreter.” As Fricke describes (italics mine for emphasis):

So we sat together with the piano-vocal score of Die Walküre in our hands. [Wagner] made exact notes for me in the score regarding all the entrances, positions, and exits. By 5 o’clock I was already at the Theater, to coach Anton Seidl so that he in turn could direct the entrances in accordance with these notes. I told Brandt and all the others what changes Wagner had wanted.\(^{59}\)

\(^{56}\) Wagner expounded on this important aesthetic principle in the staging of his operas in his essay Über die Benennung “Musikdrama” (On the Designation “Music-Drama”) from October 1872.


\(^{59}\) Fricke, Wagner in Rehearsal, 73.
Fricke’s comment above suggests that Seidl’s notebook does not reflect the full extent to which the young assistant was involved in this first production of the *Ring* (he only recorded one entrance on p. 30, that of Fricka’s arrival in her ram-drawn chariot at the beginning of Act II, but he was clearly responsible for more). In other words, the notebook is by no means comprehensive; there are no annotations for *Siegfried*, and evidently, not every entrance, exit, or special effect was documented for *Das Rheingold, Die Walküre*, and *Götterdämmerung*. (It should be noted that the notebook appears to be completely intact, so this apparent lack is not due to the removal of pages or damage to the book.) It may be assumed then, that Seidl only made notes of the aspects of staging in which he alone chiefly was responsible for implementing or coordinating. Based on the notebook’s contents, it appears that Seidl was put expressly in charge of harmonizing some of the more challenging stage effects of the *Ring* operas with the corresponding parts of the orchestral score. Broadly, these encompass: 1) stage effects involving steam; 2) gradual lighting effects; 3) stage entrances and exits of specific characters; 4) thunder effects; 5) anvils and on-stage horns; and 6) scenes involving complex stage movement, such as the opening of *Das Rheingold* and Siegfried’s funeral procession in Act III of *Götterdämmerung*.

*Steam Effects*

The liberal application of steam in the first performances of the *Ring* cycle was seminal to these early productions and their reception. For Wagner, steam became the solution, as Gundula Kreuzer has recently discussed, to veil the “machinations and imperfections of the theater in a way that preserved scenic illusion”, mediate “between the usual two- and three-dimensional theatrical contrivances”, and help to “integrate the movement and corporeality of the singing actors with the stasis of sets and props.”60 This stage innovation, developed by Wagner’s machinist, Carl Brandt, had already been employed for the Munich premieres of *Das

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60 “Wagner-Dampf: Steam in Der Ring des Nibelungen and Operatic Production,” in *The Opera Quarterly* 27, Nos. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2011): 179–218; pp. 185 and 196.
Rheingold and Die Walküre, but it was its use in the 1876 performances that made the greatest impression on critics and audiences. Generated by two locomotive boilers in a small boiler-house located just over fifty yards outside the Festspielhaus, the steam was transmitted into the auditorium via a five-inch pipe. While it was used to mimic “natural” phenomenon, such as the fire around Brünnhilde (created by infusing the steam with red light), the dragon’s breath, and Siegfried’s forging of the sword Nothung (when he plunges it into the water to cool), steam was also deployed during moments of gradual transformation, such as the scenic changes in Das Rheingold, and the fog curtain at Siegfried’s death in the final act of Götterdämmerung. Seidl’s scenic notebook indicates that it was these latter, more complex effects with which he was primarily involved in synchronizing with the music.

The first of these misty transformations that Seidl recorded is the transition from Scene 1 to Scene 2 in Das Rheingold. On p. 14 of his notebook, he indicates that the mist should begin to disperse (Nebel zerteilen) when the violins begin to play septuplet arpeggios (m. 751 in the printed score). This follows Wagner’s stage direction that here, the waves of the Rhine gradually transform into clouds, becoming a fine mist. During the following measures, the rising mist is sonically depicted by the figuration that is passed from the violins to the flutes, then finally to the harps in m. 759, where the composer indicates that the mist has now “disappeared to the top of the stage in the form of little clouds,” revealing the mountain summit of Valhalla. In the last eight measures of the transition, as the motive associated with the ring cycles through twice (mm. 761–68), Seidl notes that the entire stage is to be completely free from mist, so the audience can clearly see the sleeping figures of Wotan and Fricka at the beginning of Scene 2.

Seidl’s next annotation concerning a steam effect pertains to the end of Scene 2 in Das Rheingold, beginning immediately after the giants have captured Freia and taken her away as payment for the debt Wotan owed for their building of Valhalla (p. 15 of notebook). As a cue, he

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61 Wagner associated these arpeggios with “mists dispersing” in his complete draft score; see Warren Darcy, Wagner’s “Das Rheingold” (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 127.
notated the broken octaves played by the celli and bass (mm. 1666–67), followed by Loge’s line “Was sing nun Wotan so wild?” (mm. 1668–69), and then a note for “pale mist” (fahle Nebel). This correlates with Wagner’s stage direction at m. 1669 that a pale mist, growing gradually denser, fills the stage so that the gods “acquire an increasingly wan and aged appearance.” Here, steam is used to affect this corporeal transformation of the gods, which, as we find out later from Loge, was brought on by the loss of Freia and her youth-perpetuating apples on which they relied. Musically, the physical change is depicted by pianissimo tremolos in the violins and violas with minor key evocations of the motive associated with the goddess’s golden fruit (mm. 1677–1712). The stage is to remain hazy up to the beginning of the transition to Scene 3, when Loge invites Wotan to descend with him to Nibelheim. As Seidl indicates in his notebook, the demi-god’s summon, “dort schlüpfe mit mir hinein!” (mm. 1786–87), is the cue for “sulphurous vapors” (represented by steam) to begin seeping onto the stage, musically evoked by Wagner’s chromatic scales and trills in the violas and cellos beginning at m. 1787.

In Scene 3, steam was employed to both dramatic and practical ends in Alberich’s various transformations: first, into a cloud of mist, then a giant snake, and finally, a toad. On pp. 16 and 17 of his notebook, Seidl marks the various stages of the dwarf’s appearance and disappearance from the stage via floor traps to facilitate the effect of his metamorphosis. Although there are no notes on the application of steam here, Wagner’s stage directions are clear about its deployment. The most obvious instance is Alberich’s first disappearance into a column of mist (“Nacht und Nebel/Niemand gleich”), in which steam not only had a dramatic purpose but was also a pragmatic solution in preserving the scenic illusion by masking the machinations behind the scenes. Steam was also readily applied, without loss of dramatic continuity, to veil the dwarf’s mutation, activated by more raising and lowering of floor traps, into

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62 Katherine R. Syer was the first to examine these pages of Seidl’s notebook, and provide a facsimile of them; see “From Page to Stage: Wagner as Regisseur,” in Richard Wagner and His World, 19–20.

63 As Gundula Kreuzer has noted, the tarnhelm that Alberich puts on to facilitate his disappearance and transformations was, in Wagner’s conception, a fusion of the mythic tarnkappe (invisibility cloak) of the Nibelungelied and the Nebelkappen of the dwarf sagas, “caps that make those who wear them imperceptible by swathing them in mists”; see “Wagner-dampf,” 185.
a “Wurm” and a toad. Given that Seidl was responsible for cuing the release of steam into the auditorium during the scenic changes of Das Rheingold, it can be assumed that he was in charge of the complex coordination of its application during this part of Scene 3 as well. Indeed, the synchronization of the steam with the movement of the trapdoors was especially challenging to achieve. As Richard Fricke wrote in his diary about a blocking rehearsal with the singers on June 8, 1876, “The changes of scene, with the help of steam and trap doors leave much to be desired. Our good [Karl] Hill [who performed the role of Alberich] suffers much.”

While his notebook does not specify whether Seidl managed any steam effects for Die Walküre or Siegfried, he seems to have been responsible for several cues for steam in Götterdämmerung, including two of the most difficult scenes to stage in the entire cycle. The first of these notes, recorded on p. 47, relates to Siegfried’s death in Act III, Scene 2. Here, a “fog curtain” (Nebelschleier) is to cover the entire stage and thus, completely hide Siegfried’s funeral procession during the orchestral interlude. Seidl’s note accords with Wagner’s directions in the score, in which the composer indicates that the mists begin rising from the Rhine and filling the stage from mm. 948–51, in sync with an orchestral crescendo from pianissimo to forte in these measures, which climaxes to fortissimo at m. 955, the beginning of the Funeral March proper. At the end of the march, the stage, according to Seidl, is to be completely free of steam by m. 985 in Scene 3, four bars prior to Gutrune’s entrance on stage. This appears to match Wagner’s instructions that the mist should begin to dissipate five measures before the start of the third scene, which by m. 984, the Hall of the Gibichungs, with moonlight shining on the Rhine, should be fully visible. These “rising mists” that shroud the stage were intended to fulfill dramatic and practical aims; as Gundula Kreuzer has pointed out, they “allow for a continual, diorama-like transition, simulating the environments along the Rhine that Siegfried’s funeral procession has to traverse during the lengthy orchestral interlude” and “gradually lead to the

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64 Fricke, Wagner in Rehearsal, 68.
next location, the riverside Gibichung Hall.\textsuperscript{65}

The last cue for steam in Seidl’s notebook, which appears at the bottom third of p. 49, concerns the end of \textit{Götterdämmerung}, after Brünnhilde’s monologue. Seidl indicates here that steam is to be released following several dramatic moments on stage which are to be coordinated with Wagner’s final music; notably, after the Rhinedaughters, who have claimed the ring from Hagen, are seen playing with it in the waters of the Rhine (mm. 1534–37), and the gods in Valhalla are revealed as they go up in flames (mm. 1538–55). His annotation also suggests that the steam discharged at this point was infused with red light, thus employed to depict the glowing cloudbank on the horizon, and finally, the fiery blaze of the gods’ conflagration. As with Siegfried’s funeral procession in the 1876 performances, steam was a key element in facilitating the continuity of these final scenic transformations to the closing of the curtain at five measures before the opera’s music concludes.

\textit{Gradual Lighting Effects}

The 1876 performances of the \textit{Ring} cycle employed numerous lighting effects, but Seidl’s annotations on their application pertain specifically to \textit{gradual changes} in lighting that required careful coordination with the music in those particular scenes. Wagner had hired Hugo Bähr, the inventive technician from the Dresden Court Theatre, to implement his innovations with electrical lighting for the production. Among them was his technique of combining the softer gas lighting with the brighter, more intense electrical light, to simulate changes in weather and time of day. According to his notebook, Seidl was responsible for directing three sunrises, one in \textit{Das Rheingold} and two in \textit{Götterdämmerung}, as well as the manipulation of the blue light that shines on Erda in Scene 4 of \textit{Das Rheingold}.

The three sunrises are similarly choreographed to what Wagner crafted as their musical equivalent: a gradual orchestral crescendo. The first of these—more a figurative, than a literal

\textsuperscript{65} Kreuzer, “\textit{Wagner-dampf}”, 184.
sunrise—about which Seidl made a note on p. 19 of his book, is from Scene 4 of Das Rheingold, just after Alberich’s curse on the ring. The dwarf disappears, departing for Nibelheim, leaving Loge and Wotan with the ring, which is now in the latter’s possession. The god is so captivated by the ring that he does not realize that Alberich has left them alone until Loge alerts him, to which Wotan responds “Gönn’ ihm die geifernde Lust!” Immediately following this line, Wagner indicates in the score at m. 3208 that the stage is to grow increasingly brighter; here, the accompanying music consists of kettledrums playing the dotted rhythms reminiscent of the Nibelungs’ anvils, and a climbing melody—a variation of the “Gold” motive—in the violins. Loge sees the giants in the distance heading towards Valhalla with Freia (beginning at m. 3223, the goddess’s motive is heard in pianissimo); it is her impending return that motivates the gradual intensification of light, dispelling the mist that had previously shrouded the gods in their aging state as a result of her earlier abduction. Thirty measures later (m. 3253), Wagner’s directions indicate that the front of the stage is to be completely bright, as the “light has restore[d] the gods’ former youthful appearance.”66 Seidl’s note, however, specifies a slightly later arrival for full light: at the end of the oboe melody, at m. 3256, three measures later than specified in the score. This modification may have been an interpretative decision to synchronize exactly the intensification of the light to the orchestral crescendo from pianissimo to fortissimo, in m. 3252 to m. 3256.

For Götterdämmerung, Seidl notated how two literal sunrises were to be realized musically and dramatically. Concerning the first of these, in the Prologue at the transition from the Norns’ scene to the scene with Siegfried and Brünnhilde (notebook, p. 39), after the Norns’ descent into the earth, dawn begins to rise gradually over an orchestral interlude of 43 measures from mm. 305–45; Wagner has marked this passage “Tagesgrauen”. At mm. 347–48, during triplets played by the violins, the sun ascends quickly, ultimately reaching broad daylight

in m. 349 ("Sonnenaufgang. _ Voller Tag"). According to the score, the staging of the sunrise is to be carefully choreographed to an orchestral crescendo, the dynamics of which are very specifically notated: from piano at m. 342, to poco crescendo (mm. 343–46), piu crescendo (mm. 347–48), and finally reaching forte at m. 349. Seidl’s notes, however, indicate that the sunrise effect was further extended, so that full brightness was not achieved until m. 354, when the orchestra reaches fortissimo, just as Siegfried and Brünnhilde enter the stage. This small adjustment appears to make greater musical and dramatic sense, though it might also have been made to accommodate Bähr’s method of combining gas and electric light, with the extra measures allowing for a more gradual effect and thus, a more naturalistic sunrise.

The second sunrise occurs at the end of the first scene of Act II, following Alberich and Hagen’s eerie night encounter (notebook, p. 43). In the latter part of this scene, the dawning occurs very gradually, starting with the first streaks of light (”das erste Tagesgrauen”, according to Wagner’s directions in the score) appearing just as Hagen responds to Alberich that he shall have the ring (”der Ring soll ich haben”). Only after Alberich’s final words, “Sei treu! – Treu!”, does the electric sunrise develop fully. Again, Seidl’s annotation indicates that its staging is to be deliberately choreographed to a gradual crescendo from pianissimo/piu piano in m. 182, Scene 1, to piu f at m. 223 in Scene 2.67 The musical effect is facilitated chiefly by the thickening of the orchestral texture, first by the continual addition of horn parts, from a single instrument (m. 203, Scene 1) to eight (m. 217, Scene 2), then joined by bassoons and strings at mm. 217 and 221, respectively, which take the crescendo to its climax at mm. 223–26. At this peak, the drama of the second scene effectively begins, as Hagen sees Siegfried for the first time.

In addition to these three gradual lighting transitions, Seidl also coordinated changes in lighting with stage movement, such as before, during, and after Erda’s monologue in the fourth scene of Das Rheingold. On p. 22 of his notebook, he wrote out the violin cue at mm. 3452–56,

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67 As Wagner’s instructions in the score indicate at the beginning of Scene 2: “Von hier an färbt sich der Rhein von immer starker erglühendem Morgenroth” (“From this point onwards the Rhine begins to glow with the deepening red of dawn.”)
indicating that the stage becomes dark just before the earth goddess’s entrance (this agrees with Wagner’s stage directions in the score.) Following a sudden modulation to C-sharp minor at m. 3456 (the trombones intone a whole note on a C-sharp octave at fortissimo), a blue light appears at the rocky fissure from which Erda, via a trap door, rises slowly. According to Wagner’s instructions, she is to be elevated to chest height just before she sings “Weiche, Wotan, weiche!” As she delivers her monologue, however, Seidl’s notes suggest that she continues to rise from the ground until she is completely visible at m. 3495, when she warns Wotan to listen to her (“Höre! Höre! Höre!”) Although Wagner did not stipulate it in the published score, he must have intended for Erda to rise to full height because later, his stage directions indicate that after she counsels Wotan to shun the ring (“meide den Ring!”), she gradually begins to descend at m. 3511, first to chest height, then disappearing completely at m. 3521, after her final line, “Ich warnte dich—du weißt genug: sinn’ in Sorg’ und Furcht!” Seidl’s annotations accord with these instructions as does his cue that the blue light on Erda should also fade with her slow descent.

**Stage Entrances and Exits**

Several of Seidl’s annotations in his notebook refer to the timing of stage entrances and exits of certain characters in the *Ring* operas. It appears he directed these singers’ entries and departures to and from the stage to specific musical cues. One example is the entrance of a character to the appearance of the musical motive with which he/she is associated. In this respect, Seidl was responsible for directing Gutrune’s stage entrances to statements of her motive in *Götterdämmerung*. The motive first appears in Act I, Scene 2, when Gutrune enters the stage, carrying a drinking horn for Siegfried, whom she is meeting for the first time; played by the flutes, this motive underscores her greeting to Siegfried, “Willkommen, Gast, in Gibich’s Haus! Seine Tochter reicht dir den Trank” (see Figure 4.1).68

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68 “Welcome, guest, to Gibich’s home! His daughter brings you his drink”; mm. 470–475 in score.
The first of her subsequent entrances recorded by Seidl, at the bottom of p. 43 of his notebook, occurs near the beginning of Act II, Scene 2. Hagen calls out to Gutrune to greet Siegfried (“Hoiho! Gutrune! Komm’ heraus! Siegfried ist da: was säum’st du da?”) but as Seidl—and Wagner in his stage directions—indicate, she does not appear until after Siegfried announces that he will tell them how he won Brünnhilde for Gunther (“Euch beiden meld ich, wie ich Brünnhild band”). Although Seidl does not state it explicitly, it is evident by the music that she should enter as a version of her motive is played by the clarinets (mm. 266–69; see Figure 4.2). Similarly, Seidl indicated, at the bottom of p. 47 of his notebook, that following Siegfried’s funeral procession, after all the mist has dissipated from the stage, Gutrune makes her entrance on stage at the beginning of Act III, Scene 3. Wagner specifies in the score that she should enter at m. 989, thereby corresponding to an abbreviated reminiscence of her motive (see Figure 4.3).

For Gutrune’s stage entrance near the beginning of Act II, Scene 4, Seidl is more specific about its coordination with the music. On p. 44 of his notebook, Seidl wrote out a musical cue (mm. 788–89 in the score) on which he has indicated that Siegfried and Gutrune enter on stage at m. 789. Here, it becomes clear how specific Wagner’s music can be in dictating stage entrances for dramatic purposes. According to his directions for these measures, Gunther leads Brünnhilde to Gibichung Hall, after which Siegfried and Gutrune emerge from the hall to meet them. The music underscores this suspense-filled moment, when the erroneously-paired couples gradually confront each other for the first time, with a string of motives: the Valkyrie motive in m. 788, then a motive associated with Siegfried’s betrayal of Brünnhilde with Gutrune in mm. 789–90, followed by Gutrune’s motive in the violins at mm. 791–92 (see Figure 4.4).69

69 In Spencer and Millington’s translation of the Ring cycle’s text, the motive which comes to be associated with Siegfried’s betrayal of Brünnhilde is identified in their thematic guide as motive “64”; see p. 24 of Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung.
Another type of stage entrance Seidl was responsible for coordinating involved the appearance of a character with music that underlines their gestures or mood. Such is the case of Fricka’s arrival near the beginning of Act II, Scene 1 of *Die Walküre*. After Wotan sends off his Valkyrie daughter, Brünnhilde, to ensure Siegmund’s victory in his battle against Hunding, Fricka enters the stage, according to Wagner’s conception, in a ram-drawn cart, which she then stops abruptly and steps off. According to p. 30 of Seidl’s notebook, the music accompanying her entrance dictates the manner of her arrival. Underneath the chords he has notated as a cue, he wrote that the goddess drives (“fahren”) her cart on to the stage at m. 149 of the scene, stops and stands in it (“stehen”) at m. 152, and steps off (“aus”) at m. 153. Fricka’s actions are in fact embedded in the music of these measures: the cart’s motion is represented by the triplet figures in the celli and basses, she halts on a whole-note trill, and her exit from her chariot is announced with a quick flourish in the violins and violas. Moreover, the dynamics of this passage—a crescendo through the triplets, peaking at *forte* at the trill and triplet-grace-note.
figure—indicate the state of Fricka’s mood; this is not the visit of a woman delighted to see her husband, as we would soon find out. Evidently, Wagner wanted Seidl to pay close attention to the harmonization of these musical and gestural details because they were crucial to setting up an effective dramatic context. While many productions have since done away with Fricka’s ram-cart (the 1876 papier-maché version prompted many derisive comments in the press), it might be argued that without it or a substitute contrivance, and despite an otherwise strong interpretation, the dramatic power of her movements would be diminished.

In a similar vein, the stage entrance and exit of Alberich in Act II, Scene 1 of *Götterdämmerung* should be closely choreographed to the music. According to p. 43 of his notebook, Seidl indicates that nine measures after the curtain rises, Alberich should enter the darkened stage quickly, during the last measure of triplet quarters in pianissimo played by the third trumpet (m. 38). Then, in the next measure, moonlight—which is to appear suddenly from behind a cloud, as per Wagner’s stage directions—would dramatically reveal Alberich crouching at the foot of a semi-conscious Hagen. For maximum impact, this moment is underscored by a half-diminished 7th chord, played subito fortissimo in the winds. At the end of this scene, Wagner stipulates in the score that Alberich should begin to gradually disappear from sight as Hagen swears to himself to obtain the ring (“Mir selbst schwör ich’s---schweige die Sorge”; mm. 169–73 in the score). Seidl’s notes correspond to the composer’s instructions, though they suggest that the dwarf should begin to move offstage specifically when Hagen sings “die Sorge”. Alberich should then continue his gradual exit as he responds “Sei treu, Hagen”, so to give the impression of his voice fading into the distance. After delivering his final “Treu!” (m. 182), the dwarf should no longer be on stage.

*Thunder Effects*

Seidl’s behind-the-scenes duties, according to his scenic notebook, also extended to coordinating the production of on- or back-stage sound effects that were combined with the
orchestral music to create a particular sonic illusion. Among such effects were those for thunder. His notes suggest that he may have been responsible for cuing the stage hands operating the machinery backstage to apply them during specific moments as the music unfolded.

Three scenes requiring thunder effects are indicated in Seidl’s notebook, including Donner’s hammer blow in Scene 4 of Das Rheingold (on p. 23); the Act I prelude and the battle of Siegmund and Hunding in Act II, Scene 5 of Die Walküre (pp. 28; 31–32); and the beginning and end of Waltraute’s visit to Brünnhilde in Act I, Scene 3 of Götterdämmerung (pp. 41–42). In all cases, Wagner sought to create effects that simulated nature as closely as possible, musically and visually. A flash of lightning always preceded a thunder effect, and is consistently represented in the orchestral score by some kind of rapid, ascending gesture. An electric-light flash unit was simultaneously deployed to provide the visual counterpart. These “flashes” are followed by long timpani trills evoking rumbling thunder, which were enhanced by a thunder-creating machine backstage: a large hutch from which iron balls were released to roll down a long trough. Seidl’s cue for Donner’s hammer blow is a clear example of how the music both signals and supports the visual and aural stage effects for lightning and thunder: after the god’s song, “Heda! Heda! Hedol!”, four measures of ascending triplet scales in the winds and strings in divisi (mm. 3702–05) lead to a fortissimo climax. Here, at m. 3706, Donner strikes his hammer (from the stage) which should be heard alone on the first beat of the measure, after which the orchestra responds immediately with a melodic flourish (lightning), followed by a long trill in the timpani (thunder).

Beyond the harmonization of these effects with the music, Seidl (and by extension, Wagner) appears to have been preoccupied during these rehearsals about the specific dynamics of the timpani rolls in the orchestra pit. For example, Seidl’s notes pertaining to the Act I prelude of Die Walküre show that the two-bar recurrences of Donner’s motive (played by the trumpets in mm. 75–76, as notated on p. 28), interspersed with timpani trills, should all be played fortissimo until m. 89. Only at the third recurrence of the motive (in m. 90) should the
Regarding the effects for thunder just before Siegmund goes to battle with Hunding in Act II, Scene 5 in *Die Walküre*, Seidl recorded similar directions in the form of two musical cues. The first of these, consisting of mm. 1913–14, indicates that a flash of lightning occurs on the ascending thirty-second-note flourish, and is followed by a thunderous timpani roll on F on the third beat. The second cue, mm. 1918–23, after Sieglinde’s dream-stage monologue, is likewise comprised of a sixteenth-note ascending figure, and a *fortissimo* timpani trill on the fourth beat. After each of these initial “cracks” of thunder, the volume of the timpani is to be sustained at *fortissimo* for several measures, before diminishing (four measures later the first time, and five measures later the second time). In the first instance, it is worth pointing out that Seidl’s notes do not exactly match the dynamic markings in the score. Wagner initially intended that the beginning of the timpani’s trill at m. 1913 sound at *mezzo forte* and that the timpani should *diminuendo* immediately after the thunder clap; Seidl, however, noted that the clap should start at a much more forceful *fortissimo*. Perhaps this modification in the volume was necessary to make the overall effect of a storm at the *Festspielhaus* more convincing. Since the timpani were situated at the very back and bottom of the covered orchestra pit, it may have been required that they be played louder in order to support the thunder machine being deployed backstage.

The dynamics of the timpani part were also of concern to Seidl in *Götterdämmerung*, particularly for the thunder effects that frame the beginning and end of Waltraute’s visit to Brünnhilde in Act I, Scene 3. On pp. 41–42 of his notebook, Seidl recorded the musical cues for thunder which are to be synchronized with the trills in the timpani part. Three of these occur in succession near the start of the scene: the first at mm. 1028–31, a distant rumble that breaks Brünnhilde’s rapt contemplation of the ring; the second, at mm. 1039–42, which draws her attention to an approaching thundercloud; and the third, at mm. 1085–88, when a thunderclap-

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70 According to Porges’s rehearsal account of the prelude to Act I, Wagner was also concerned about the “correct performance” of the theme associated with Donner, specifically that the accents should be placed on the upper notes; see *Wagner Rehearsing the ‘Ring’*, 42.
like sound is heard, as per Wagner’s stage directions, to coincide with the fortissimo climax at m. 87. Taken together, these measures depict aurally Waltraute’s unexpected arrival, setting up her ensuing dramatic confrontation of her sister. Thunder accompanies Waltraute’s exit from the stage at the end of the scene as well, as dictated by Wagner’s orchestral score, with timpani trills as sonic representations of the receding storm clouds associated with her departure. Seidl likely wanted to ensure that the composer’s dynamics were precisely observed during the trills at mm. 1517–21 and mm. 1531–46, in order to properly create the aural effect of a storm cloud rising (crescendo to forte) and then disappearing into the distance (diminuendo to pianissimo).

Anvils and On-stage Horns

In addition to directing the thunder effects, Seidl’s notebook indicates that he coordinated other kinds of sonic illusions that involved instruments on (or behind) the stage and the orchestra in the pit. These include the anvils used in the scenic transitions as Loge and Wotan journey to and from Nibelheim in Das Rheingold, and instances of on-stage horns in Götterdämmerung.

Seidl documented the first of the cues and directions for anvils on the bottom half of p. 15 and the top of p. 16 of his notebook. His annotation begins at m. 1853 of Scene 2, the first climatic point in the scenic transition when the winds and strings begin to play the dotted rhythms evoking the Nibelungs and their industrious mining of gold. The orchestra is at fortissimo and remains at this volume when the anvils join in at m. 1862, first softly, then gradually getting louder as they take over from the orchestra, until only the anvils are being played, beginning at m. 1870. Four measures later, they reach fortissimo, which they sustain for another four measures, before they start to diminuendo. At this point (m. 1878), the orchestra (specifically, violins and violas) joins back in, while the sound of the anvils continues to fade over twelve measures from fortissimo to pianissimo, until they completely die away at m. 1889.
The reverse counterpart to this transition—from Scene 3 to Scene 4, as Wotan and Loge with Alberich ascend from Nibelheim to Valhalla—is recorded on p. 18 of Seidl’s notebook. The beginning of the musical cue is again the first climax of the orchestral transition at m. 2752, with the violins at fortissimo playing a syncopated motive in a descending sequence, and gradually getting softer until it reaches piano at m. 2765. The anvil motive returns at m. 2767, played quietly by the violas, then swelling to forte at m. 2771, and fading again four measures later, giving way to the anvils alone at mm. 2775–82. Seidl has jotted down the dynamic changes in the anvil part, which match those of Wagner’s score: 4 measures crescendo (mm. 2775–78) to forte, then 4 measures diminuendo, and finally 8 measures of the anvils retreating to pianissimo.

It bears remembering that these two orchestral transitions incorporating the anvils are much more than just musical interludes; Wagner had clearly meant for this effect to be an essential part of the drama. In the orchestral score, his stage directions explicitly reveal what is happening, that is, as Wotan and Loge descend into, and emerge from, Nibelheim, they pass by the laboring Nibelungs with the noise of anvils “as though of people forging can be heard on all sides” (wachsenden Geräusch wie von Schmiedenden wird überall her vernommen).71 To create this effect, no less than eighteen anvils of different sizes are called for, and they are carefully arranged to the right, left, and back of the stage. Thus, as the music of the orchestra dovetails into the music of the anvils on stage and then back to the orchestra again, Wotan and Loge’s journey is given a kind of three-dimensional sonic representation, even though their physical actions may be veiled from the audience.

On-stage horns are similarly employed to dramatic effect in Götterdämmerung, of which Seidl, according to his notebook, appears to have coordinated several instances (see pp. 42 and 44). The first he notated occurs in the latter part of Act I, Scene 3, when a distant horn call announces the impending arrival of Siegfried (actually Gunther disguised by the tarnhelm) at

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71 In the transition from Scene 3 to Scene 4, Wagner indicates that the scene changes as before but in the reverse order, and that once again, it leads past the forges (Die Verwandlung führt wieder an den Schmieden vorbei).
Brünnhilde’s rock (mm. 1580–1601). Here, the theme associated with Siegfried is played by a horn backstage, not in the pit. As this solo had to align with the orchestral and vocal parts, it is possible that Seidl himself conducted the horn player, together with Hans Richter in the pit. Similarly, Seidl appears to have cued at the beginning of Act II, Scene 3 the playing of Hagen’s cowhorn, which summon onto the stage the chorus of vassals (mm. 387–92). On-stage horns are also required at the end of Act II, Scene 5, when several of them produce the calls of Siegfried and the vassals, and signal the double-wedding procession of Siegfried and Gutrune, and Gunther and Brünnhilde. They play a bright motive, which, although only four measures long (mm. 1680–83), must be synchronized exactly with the orchestral score.

Complex Scenes

Significant portions of Seidl’s notebook are devoted to some of the most difficult and complicated stage effects in the Ring cycle, notably, in Das Rheingold and Götterdämmerung. These include the choreography of the swimming Rhinedaughters (Scene 1 of Rheingold and Act III, Scene 1 of Götterdämmerung), and in Götterdämmerung, the Norns in the opening Prologue, and the crowd scenes (the chorus of vassals and stage extras) in various parts of Acts II and III. Seidl’s more extensive annotations for these particular scenic events reflect the extent to which he was involved in their staging. Richard Fricke’s own diary entries, especially concerning the Rhinedaughters and the Norns, also provide further insight into Seidl’s notes. They illuminate how closely he and Seidl—along with Wagner—worked together to try to realize the composer’s vision for enacting these scenes.

Staging the Rhinedaughters

Wagner was aware that the opening scene of Das Rheingold would be especially difficult to stage effectively; it continues to pose challenges for opera houses today. For the 1876 performances, he sought to convey the illusion of the Rhinedaughters playfully swimming in the
river, while the singers—Lilli and Marie Lehmann, and Minna Lammert—were physically strapped in their “swimming machines”. It would be no easy feat. Developed by Fritz Brandt, these contraptions each consisted of a triangular wooden box on wheels, from which a tripod extended upwards and supported a steel pipe that was attached to the “cradle” which held the singer. Using a counterweight system, the height of the pipe could be manipulated so that it telescoped up to approximately 20 feet and then brought back down, thereby creating the impression of a Rhinedaughter swimming up to the surface of the river and diving down again.\footnote{The mechanical details of the “swimming machine” have been described, with accompanying diagrams, by Carl-Friedrich Baumann in Bühnentechnik im Festspielhaus (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1980), 188–190.} While the wagons were solidly built, they were not easy to maneuver; weighing at 57 pounds, plus bearing a singer, each one required three people to operate it.

In May 1875, Wagner already wrote to Richard Fricke requesting his aid “to work out the most difficult stage movements…in particular…the scenes with the three Rhinedaughters.”\footnote{Fricke, Wagner in Rehearsal, 14. Letter originally published in Richard Wagner an seine Künstler (=Bayreuther Briefe II), ed. Erich Kloss (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1908), 114–115.} A year later, while working in Bayreuth, Fricke recalled in his May 21 diary entry that he and Wagner experienced considerable frustration in trying to choreograph this scene. As he wrote, Wagner had initially wanted the exact movements of the Rhinedaughters to be marked in a piano-vocal score:

\begin{quote}
[This complicated swimming of the Rhinedaughters] must be choreographed…The principal machinist will be commanded by three music directors, [Anton] Seidl, [Franz] Fischer, and [Felix] Mottl…All the movements, up and down and sideways, have to be thoroughly rehearsed…you will have to draw that in choreographic instructions on the piano-vocal score with colored crayons.\footnote{Op. cit., 52–53.}
\end{quote}

Seeing this to be an impossible task, Fricke suggested to the composer that the scene be choreographed instead like a dance, with each Rhinedaughter’s vocal part marked with colored signs in “red, blue, and orange—\textit{specific} signs, one color for swimming towards the right and the left, another for rising or getting down, and one for lying down and for getting up.” The music directors (Seidl, Fischer, and Mottl) would then sit in their assigned wagon with their respective
vocal part and learn the “*pas de trois*” along with the “three master machinists, who have to pay attention to the directors.” Their movements will therefore be “synchronized measure by measure, just as would be done in a ballet hall.”

Fricke’s method appeared to have worked successfully but his diary entry for May 30, 1876 nevertheless attests to the extensive time and effort devoted to working out the scenic action, even for just the first two hundred measures of the opening scene. As he described:

The rehearsal began at 7 o’clock. The first scene, the scene in the Rhine, was set up. It is very original and magnificent. The apparatus worked well, each being operated by three people. The first is the music directors (Seidl for Woglinde, Fischer for Wellgunde, and Mottl for Flosshilde). The second is the person who guides the machine with a sort of steering wheel, and the third sits in the machine and moves the swimmer up or down as required. After about two hours of working out the movements in accordance with my notes, we got as far as Alberich’s entrance. Three fairly short and lightweight gymnasts took the place of the Rheindaughters. Everyone worked hard, perspiring.

Seidl himself recalled that this rehearsal alone lasted for six hours. Over the next three evenings, they continued to practice the choreography, and finally, on June 3, the singers tried out the machines for the first time. The hard work appeared to have paid off; according to various accounts, the final result was a remarkable accomplishment.

Seidl recorded his operation of the “swimming wagon” bearing Lilli Lehmann on pp. 5 to 7 of his scenic notebook. On the first half of p. 6, we can see that Wagner’s stage directions in the printed score were modified somewhat to accommodate the practicalities of staging this scene. Here, as mentioned earlier, Seidl recorded that the curtain should open when the oboe plays the theme at mm. 97–98, thirty measures earlier than when Wagner indicates in the score it should happen: at mm. 126–27, with Woglinde entering the stage at m. 131. According to

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76 Fricke, *Wagner in Rehearsal*, 61, 63. According to p. 3 of Seidl’s notebook, this rehearsal was to piano accompaniment.
78 Fricke wrote that “everything was so successful...The scene is so unbelievably beautiful that one can become ecstatic.” See his diary entry for June 3, in *Wagner in Rehearsal*, 64–65. Seidl also jotted on p. 3 of his notebook that “it was a success, as never before”. Lilli Lehmann recounted her experience with the swimming machine in her autobiography, *My Path Through Life*, trans. Alice Benedict Seligman (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1914), 221–23.
79 See also Martina Strocke’s transcription and brief discussion of this page from Seidl’s notebook in *Wagner als Regisseur*, 43.
Seidl’s notes, however, since the curtain opens sooner, Woglinde consequently enters the stage earlier as well, and is already seen circling the rocky ledge twice before m. 131. At her third revolution, during the rising bass figures which begin at m. 131, she “swims” slowly out from the left. This adjustment in the timing was probably made to allow for the wagon to be seen moving around the rock in a convincing manner (as well as to give the machinists more time to maneuver it), and the prostrate Lehmann to be brought to an upright position, before she sang her opening line, “Weia, waga, woge du Welle.”

The specific movements of Woglinde’s swimming machine as she interacts with the other Rhinedaughters, follow on the rest of p. 6. In response to Wellgunde’s question, “Woglinde, wachst du allein?”, Woglinde turns around (umdrehen) to address her. Afterward, when Wellgunde “dives down” to catch up to Woglinde, the latter escapes her reach by traveling quickly to the right at “sicher von dir.” On p. 7, Seidl’s annotations indicate that Woglinde’s wagon undergoes more intricate maneuvering during the musical interlude between Flosshilde’s line “Sonst bust beide das Spiel!” and Alberich’s entrance. According to Wagner’s stage directions here, the Rhinedaughters are darting about playfully, joking and laughing. For Seidl and the machinists of Lehmann’s cart, these movements translated to: “Turn around, return behind the rocky ledge again; turn around and from left come towards the front, stop completely on the right! High up during the last passages.” This last command stipulates that the steel pole of the cart be extended upward so Woglinde is positioned high above the stage, and is gazing down when Alberich appears and shouts “Hehe! Ihr Nicker!”

Two additional actions for Woglinde’s cart in the opening scene, after the dwarf’s entrance at m. 185, are documented on p. 10 of Seidl’s notebook. Hearing Alberich’s voice, Woglinde calls out “Hei! Wer ist dort?”, and she dives down to investigate matters with her sisters. To portray this, Seidl instructed that the cradle bearing Lehmann be lowered. When the

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80 As Fricke noted in his diary, “One and two beats before the beginning of their singing, they should be brought by the musicians to an upright position. Only in this way, my dear Master, will we be able to clear the great reef of this scene.” In *Wagner in Rehearsal*, 54.
Rhinedaughters catch a glimpse of Alberich, Wellgunde and Woglinde exclaim “Pfui! der Garstige!” and recoil in disgust. At this moment, the steel pole is extended once again, thereby raising Woglinde, to give the illusion that she is darting away in revulsion. Overall, these movements correspond directly to Wagner’s stage directions in the orchestral score.

In *Götterdämmerung*, the Rhinedaughters reappear on stage in Act III, Scene 1, when they try to persuade Siegfried to return the ring to them. Concerning this scene, Seidl recorded another series of cues for the up-and-down movements of Woglinde’s cradle (see pp. 45–46 of his notebook). These also match Wagner’s stage directions in the score. After Flosshilde sings “Laßt uns berathen”, the composer indicates that all three Rhinedaughters plunge beneath the waves (mm. 154–60; in his notebook, Seidl has written “ab”, or “down”), then resurface when they hear Siegfried calling out “He Schelm, in welchem Berge barg’st du so schnell mir das Wild?” (mm. 169–75; “auf”, or “up”, in Seidl’s notes). Later, while teasing Siegfried, the Rhinedaughters perform similar movements: after singing together “Wie schade dass er geizig ist”, they dive down into the river (mm. 250–60), and come back up when Siegfried calls them back, “Kommt rasch! Ich schenk euch den Ring!” (mm. 275–79). Near the end of the scene, when the Rhinedaughters exclaim “zu ihr!” and depart from Siegfried, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that they should move towards the back of the stage “at a leisurely pace”, as they sing their final chorus (mm. 443–47). In this instance, Seidl’s notes slightly deviate from the score, for he specifies that the Rhinedaughters turn back after “sie beut uns bess’res Gehör” at m. 442, and are then lowered from their presumably suspended positions of their cradles while they sing “zu ihr”. Subsequently, from the safety of lower positions, they are wheeled off stage while they sing their last lines, “Weialala leia/Wallala leialala.”

**Staging the Norns**

In addition to the scenes with the Rhinedaughters, Seidl recorded many notes for the Norns’ Scene in the Prologue of *Götterdämmerung*. These annotations, on pp. 37–39 of his
notebook, appear to refer to the Norns’ winding and their passing back and forth of the rope of destiny. Seidl used the numbers “Eins” and “Zwei” to denote these specific actions, of which there are nine to be coordinated with the music from mm. 42 to 300; this is the most plausible explanation for these numbers since they accord with Wagner’s stage directions in the score.81

While the rehearsal notes of Fricke and Porges do not further illuminate what Seidl wrote, they do reveal that the proper staging of this scene concerned Wagner greatly. According to Porges, the movements of the Norns should be as “limited as possible” and each should gaze at the rope with her eyes as if to read runes.82 Fricke, on the other hand, recalls a drawn-out discussion with Wagner about the manner in which the Norns should pass around the rope. In the ballet master’s opinion, if this action was not done properly, it could seriously disrupt the somber nature of the scene. As he had explained to Wagner:

When we read a scene of such seriousness and gloom, our fantasy is in full operation; as soon as it is visually presented to us, with all of the other senses, our created image could be reduced to ridicule. In this scene, which we have to make come alive to our eyes and our senses, in order to set it up, there is such a reef! The rope must be long, golden, and fairly light. On the other hand, however, it must be heavy enough that it can be thrown to someone. I’m afraid that the three ladies will never learn this.83

In his view, Wagner felt the singers just needed to practice the actions until they did it well, but Fricke proposed that, if by chance they still could not get it right, the rope could either be moved mechanically “through invisible wires,” or the Norns could mime the winding of the rope. Neither of these suggestions, however, satisfied Wagner, who wanted the action to be as authentic as possible. Fricke gave in to the composer’s wishes in the end but he warned Wagner that the scene’s effectiveness would now solely depend on the singers being good actresses, at least “like Frau Jachmann-Wagner”, who played the First Norn. Unfortunately in the 1876 performances, the end result was not entirely satisfactory; Sylvester Baxter of the

81 For further details, see notes 48 to 58 of the transcription of Seidl’s notebook in Appendix D.
82 Porges, Wagner Rehearsing the Ring, 121.
83 See Fricke’s May 15 entry in Wagner in Rehearsal, 45.
Boston Advertiser, among other critics, found that the lack of action in the Norns’ scene made it “tiresome” to watch, and in general, it seemed dramatically unessential.⁸⁴ In subsequent performances outside of Bayreuth, the scene was often cut, due to its unpopularity and to prevent poor performances.⁸⁵ For the American presentations of Götterdämmerung, including the premiere, the scene was removed entirely, though it was restored for a brief time at the turn of the century, for the first presentations of the un-cut Ring cycle in 1899.

Crowd Scenes in Götterdämmerung

The final opera of the Ring is the only part of the cycle in which Wagner incorporated crowd scenes. According to his notebook, Seidl appeared to have helped coordinate these, particularly the movements of the many on-stage supernumeraries who portrayed the chorus of vassals and the Gibichung women in Acts II and III. (This is not surprising since Seidl himself rehearsed the chorus.) In this capacity he must have been assisting Fricke, whom the composer had initially enlisted to gather these actors. Wagner was quite particular about how these extras behaved on stage: even as part of a group, each member of the chorus to have stage presence and be able to show their individual character through their gestures. As Fricke recalled the composer instructing him:

I do not need a great number of them, but I do demand of every actor that he should be able to portray his character…I would also like some women of fine appearance—these would have to sing only individual interjections. Their voices are not so important. More important is secure stage presence and dignified action in exciting scenes.⁸⁶

Concerning the vassal chorus, Seidl recorded two cues in his notebook. The first, which appears on p. 44, marks the entry of the vassals at the beginning of Act II, Scene 3, when Hagen’s cowhorn summons them. The second, on p. 47, is from the beginning of Act III, Scene 2, when the vassals sing “Hoiho!” from off-stage (mm. 511–19). In this latter instance, Seidl

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⁸⁴ Boston Advertiser, 14 Sept 1876, col D.
⁸⁵ According to Cosima Wagner, Wagner first decided to cut the Norns’ scene for the 1878 Leipzig performances of the Ring because “he knows that, when badly performed, they are bound to be incomprehensible.” See her diary entry for 12 July 1878 in CWD 2, 112.
⁸⁶ See Fricke, Wagner in Rehearsal, 15; originally published in Richard Wagner an seine Künstler, 117–18.
himself may have conducted them backstage, and he would thus have been responsible for synchronizing their voices with the orchestra conducted by Hans Richter in the pit.

Seidl appears to have also managed the stage movement of the chorus in the opera’s final scene, one of the most challenging to choreograph. His notes for this begin on p. 48 of his scenic book, with Hagen’s cue, “Hoiho!” at mm. 1033–34 and 1041–42. Underneath, Seidl wrote the first part of Gutrune’s question that she asks of her half-brother “with great fear” (m. 1048), “Was geschah, Hagen? Nicht hört’ ich sein Horn!” Immediately afterwards, according to Wagner’s directions in the score, a procession of vassals carrying Siegfried’s body enter on stage, along with “a great confusion” (Verwirrung) of men and women carrying torches and firebrands.87 Seidl’s annotations, however, suggest that a more orderly arrangement was implemented for the 1876 performances—i.e. with the women entering first, followed by the men with Siegfried’s stretcher—perhaps due to limitations of space on the stage.

Continuing on the latter half of p. 48 of his notebook, Seidl outlined the stage action of the chorus, which he presumably directed in accordance with Wagner’s stage directions, to take place following Brünnhilde’s command to build the funeral pyre. As he recorded, the men should first build the pyre “slowly and in a measured manner” in the back part of the stage, and then “die Trauer” add their rugs, herbs, and flowers to the mound. Later, the women turn back as Brünnhilde sings “Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott” from her final monologue, and they should be behind the pyre by the time the Valkyrie signals the vassals to advance with Siegfried’s body (see top of p. 49 of notebook; mm. 1359–68 in the score). Seidl’s next note relates to the moment Brünnhilde hurls the torch onto the pyre, which is then followed by the onstage appearance of Grane, in this case, performed by a live steed. At the bottom of the page are his cues for steam and red light during the final conflagration of the gods and the return of the Ring to the Rhinedaughters, which are discussed above.

87 Translation by Stewart Spencer, Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung, 345. The original direction in the score reads: “Männer und Frauen, mit Lichten und Feuerbränden, geleiten in grosser Verwirrung den Zug mit Siegfried’s Leiche Heimkehrenden.”
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As the above analysis illuminates, Seidl’s scenic notebook shows the significant extent to which the young conductor was involved in the first production of the complete Ring cycle. Not surprisingly, the hands-on experience he gained in harmonizing the stage elements with the music significantly shaped his development into Wagner’s ideal type of conductor. By the time he arrived in the United States, Seidl had already honed his knowledge of the cycle and its staging through numerous presentations all over Europe.

**Seidl and the Ring Cycle at the Metropolitan Opera House**

When Seidl began his six-season tenure with Stanton’s company at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, he benefitted from an administrative restructuring that enabled him to focus entirely on conducting, while the director Stanton and his assistant Walter Damrosch assumed managerial duties. The repertory for each season was pre-determined by Stanton, who, in turn, faithfully followed Leopold Damrosch’s original proposal; Seidl simply had to choose which operas he wished to conduct. While the repertory included other German-language works besides Wagner’s as well as several of the more popular Italian and French operas (in German translation), Walter Damrosch recalled that Seidl was territorial about the Wagner operas and did not like to share their performances with him (a situation that had deeply frustrated Damrosch). In the case of the Ring operas, with the exception of a handful of performances of Die Walküre near the start of the 1885–1886 season and one performance in Chicago in 1890, Seidl conducted all presentations, including the American premieres of Siegfried, Götterdämmerung, and Das Rheingold. He also led the first complete American Ring cycle in 1889, which he subsequently brought to Philadelphia, Boston, Milwaukee, Chicago, and

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88 By comparison Leopold Damrosch had taken on both administrative and musical positions as director and conductor, which made him extraordinarily busy; this was in addition to his duties as the conductor of the New York Symphony and Oratorio Society. His son Walter believed that it was over-exhaustion from all these responsibilities that eventually brought on the case of pneumonia that led to his father’s untimely death. See My Musical Life, 57.
St. Louis on a post-season tour. In total, this amounted to: 10 single performances of Das Rheingold, 17 of Die Walküre, 21 of Siegfried, 18 of Götterdämmerung, and 9 complete cycles.

By most accounts, Seidl’s interpretation of the Ring operas was very positively received, and rarely, if at all, criticized. Unfortunately, a lack of certain sources precludes a detailed analysis of his conducting technique. His personal scores to the Ring cycle (at least to the American performances of the operas) are no longer extant. Moreover, though he was a charismatic conductor, Seidl was a very private man; he did not write an autobiography, and he rarely granted interviews to the press. However, one can gain a general sense of his conducting style and his ideas about the musical interpretation and the staging of the Ring operas from Henry T. Finck’s “memorial”-cum-biography of the conductor, and Seidl’s own essay from 1895, “On Conducting”. These sources also contain various anecdotes from singers he worked with in Europe and in the United States, and their comments reveal what it was like for them to work with him on the cycle’s operas.

Several qualities made Seidl an ideal Wagnerian conductor and outstanding interpreter of the Ring in the late nineteenth century. As Joseph Horowitz summarized in his study of Seidl’s American career, they included: Seidl’s comprehensive understanding of every aspect of the world of theatre and opera, the fluidity of his conducting, and his ability to identify closely with singers. Among everything the composer taught him, the principle that perhaps most influenced Seidl was that the conductor should always assume responsibility for the staging, and even more so when the scenic arrangements are deficient. “Stage managers will not become more musical,” he wrote in his 1895 essay, “and hence conductors must devote themselves more to the stage that the purposes of the composers may be better realized.”

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89 The Seidl Archives at Columbia University and the Metropolitan Opera Archives do not have Seidl’s scores or production records of the Ring operas from the Metropolitan’s German period.

90 See Joseph Horowitz’s assessment of Seidl’s personality in Wagner Nights, 128-31.


92 Finck, Anton Seidl, 221.
In Seidl’s view, the fulfillment of this principle in the performance of Wagner opera (and notably, the *Ring* cycle), meant two things in particular. The first is that the conductor must remain flexible with the tempi of the music. Not only was this necessary for proper musical interpretation and dramatic pacing, but the flow of the music must work logically with the stage action, otherwise the performance runs the risk of confusing the audience. As Seidl recalled Wagner advising him, “My dear friend, give your attention to the stage, following my scenic directions, and you will hit the right thing in the music without question.” If the conductor was not attuned to coordinating the music with the stage action, the result was often a troubling contradiction of sight and sound. As an example, Seidl recalled on one occasion hearing the break of a lightning flash *ritardando* in the orchestra, while on the stage the bolt was indicated surprisingly well. This was in the beginning of *Die Walküre*. The musician (or better, perhaps, the educated time-beater) aimed to meddle with Nature’s performance of her own trade by introducing his nicely-executed *ritardando*, but succeeded only in proving that the stage hand who manipulated the lightning had more intelligence then he. If the musician had kept his eyes on the stage instead of on the score he would have seen his blunder, he would have become a more careful observer of natural phenomena.

Seidl also noted that this lack of attention to the relationship between the orchestral score and stage action often plagued many performances of the opening scene of *Das Rheingold*:

The swimming of the Rhine-daughters is carried out very well at most of the larger theatres, but the movements of the nixies do not illustrate the accompanying music. Frequently the fair one rises while a descending violin passage is playing, and again to the music of hurried upward passages she sinks gently to the bottom of the river. Neither is it a matter of indifference whether the movements of the Rhine-daughters be fast or slow. At a majority of the theatres this is treated as a matter of no consequence, regardless of the fact that the public are utterly bewildered by such contradictions between what they see and what they hear.

Secondly, the conductor must be able to direct singers’ stage movements so they are in harmony with the music, even when they are not singing. To do so, he/she must know how to interpret Wagner’s directions and the orchestral score in terms of gestures and other kinds of physical expression, and guide singers accordingly. For instance, as Seidl explains,
In the first scene of *Die Walküre* between Siegmund, Sieglinde and afterward Hunding, there are a great number of little interludes—dainty, simple, and melodic in manner. Now, if the conductor is unable to explain the meaning of these little interludes to the singers, he cannot associate them with the requisite gestures, changes of facial expression and even steps, and the scene is bound to make a painfully monotonous impression. No effect is possible here with the music alone.\(^96\)

In general, Seidl appears to have coached his singers to always follow Wagner’s stage directions to the utmost detail, and he was very reluctant to deviate from this standard. However, on occasion, he was willing to accommodate alternative ideas should they make better musical or dramatic sense. The tenor Anton Schott, who sang the role of Siegmund under Seidl with Neumann’s touring Wagner company and at the Metropolitan Opera House, shared this anecdote about working with the conductor:

> So thoroughly was Anton Seidl imbued with the spirit of Wagner’s art that he did not hesitate, on at least one occasion that I know of, to sacrifice the letter to it. I studied the part of Siegmund with him. At the place, “Ha, who passed, who entered here?” before the love song, Wagner prescribes, “Siegmund gently leads Sieglinde to the bench, so that she sits beside him.” When, at the first performance (Auguste Kraus was the Sieglinde), I tried to follow these directions, it seemed unnatural that at this moment, when Siegmund stands with arm round her, while the moonlight from the opened door floods the room, there should be slightest motion—which must infallibly break the charm and bring her to a realizing sense of the situation—even the gentlest leading of Sieglinde seemed to me rude violence where the dropping of a needle might have destroyed the spell, whereas the prescribed action is afterwards brought about naturally by the course of the poem and the music, and there still remain twenty-five minutes for them to sit on the bench. In brief, I was unable to follow the directions; my legs refused to move. Seidl declared, “Hm! In reality you are right, but you must not—we must follow Wagner’s own directions.” I did so for a time, but one evening—it was at Bologna—I informed Sieglinde that she must be prepared for a change. I refused to budge; whereat there was great excitement behind the scenes, stage manager and impresario running about whispering directions to me, but I did not move till I thought the time had arrived.

> When the curtain fell the public applauded frantically, but the impresario and stage manager greeted me with a cold douche of censure. A moment later Seidl came on the stage, embraced me with a laugh, and exclaimed, “Never do it any other way as long as you live. Had Wagner lived to see it he would have given you his blessing.” I followed his advice, with the result of angering other conductors to whom the letter was more sacred than the spirit. There you have a picture of Anton Seidl and of other conductors. He was liberal, they pedantic.\(^97\)

Seidl also knew the scores to Wagner’s operas so well that when coaching each singer, he could act out all the individual parts, when necessary. His obsession with the details of

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\(^96\) Ibid.
staging extended even to the props used by the singers in performance; like Wagner, Seidl sought to achieve the most realistic illusion possible. The soprano Lillian Nordica recalled going with Seidl to purchase fabric from a New York shop for a veil that Isolde would wear in Act II of *Tristan und Isolde*. According to her, he asked the shop girls to give him different types of tulle, which he then tested for effect by “seiz[ing] one after another at one end and flirt[ing] the other rapidly through the air.”

A significant number of vocalists who performed under Seidl’s direction in the New York presentations of the *Ring* operas had worked with him previously in Europe. It is not known to what extent he was involved in the hiring of singers for the Metropolitan’s resident company; while he may have made recommendations (especially for the Wagner repertory), he did not accompany Stanton and Damrosch on their trips abroad each summer to recruit artists. Seidl might have had more control over casting certain singers for the *Ring*, since these operas were among the most anticipated performances of any given season. Indeed, many of the singers who appeared in European performances of the *Ring* cycle reprised their roles at the Metropolitan Opera House, including Albert Niemann as Siegmund, and Heinrich Vogl as Siegmund and Siegfried. Others had graduated into major roles, like Lilli Lehmann, who went from being a Rhinedaughter at the Bayreuth premiere to portraying Brünnhilde in New York. Thus, these singers, already trained in the roles of the *Ring* operas, embodied a certain artistic expertise, and they helped make the Metropolitan Opera performances seem that much more authoritative. Moreover, when they performed with Seidl in the United States, many felt a strong sense of solidarity with him that made the rehearsal process and the performances particularly enjoyable, and perhaps a reason for their relative success with audiences. Reflecting on her time with the conductor in New York, Lilli Lehmann wrote in her autobiography that,

Anton Seidl…has always been to me the best of all Wagner conductors, who, beginning under Angelo Neumann, used the baton flexibly and unobtrusively, without seeking after sensational effects in conducting. I may say, indeed, that we were happy under his

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perfect leading, and he also, on the other hand, must be deemed fortunate that he
needed only to follow, in an intellectual sense, so many artistic authorities, which made it
possible for both sides to give admirable renderings. We understood each other, and not
the slightest discord ever arose between the artists up above and the conductor down
below, who led his splendid orchestra so gloriously. German opera owes much to Anton
Seidl. Here was illustrated once more how brilliantly very many “authorities” could work
together, and how much better it is for an opera-house to be provided with many artists
trained in a good school, than to be one where the management, instead of dealing with
artistic talent, attempts to produce works of art with dolls who are manipulated by
strings. 99

The singers who worked with Seidl appreciated above all his musical sensitivity, to them
and to the score. Because he knew their parts and the text, he rarely had to look at the score
while conducting, and therefore his eyes were almost always on the stage. This enabled him to
maintain a fluid connection with the orchestra and the stage, and he could modify the tempi as
appropriate to the dramatic moment and the singer, without destroying the architecture of the
passage. For Seidl, the ability to do this seemed almost instinctual; as remembered by the
brothers Jean and Eduoard de Reske, the Polish tenor and bass who sang in the 1896–1897
performances of Siegfried,

[Seidl] understood singing, seemed to know by intuition exactly what the singer would do
in every case and always helped him to do it well. But he did not accomplish this by
following the singer slavishly. There are many conductors who can follow a singer in a
ritardando such as singers love to make at the close of a musical phrase, but there are
few who know exactly how to catch up the rhythm again and restore the equilibrium, as
Seidl did, without apparently affecting the shape of the musical period in the least. 100

Indeed, Seidl felt that there was never one “correct” tempo for any given moment, but that the
conductor must adapt it according to the voice type of the singer, ensuring that the text can be
heard clearly, without the singer over-exerting his/her voice. 101 On the other hand, he was also
quite a strict leader and did not allow too many liberties to be taken by the singer. Marianne
Brandt, who had worked with Seidl extensively in Bayreuth and in Europe, recalled clashing with
the conductor in her performance as Brünnhilde in a production of Götterdämmerung in
Darmstadt. “During the finale,” she wrote,

99 Lehmann, My Path Through Life, 343–44.
100 Finck, Anton Seidl, 259.
I was completely entranced and probably dragged the *tempi* a little, for suddenly my exaltation was rudely broken by several sharp raps of the baton, while Seidl’s eyes were flashing fire at me. I was naturally angry with him because he had corrected me so conspicuously before the audience; but when, later on, he told me that my Brünnhilde was very good, the old friendship was renewed.\(^{102}\)

Concerning singers’ interpretations of various roles of the *Ring*, Seidl held strong opinions. He did not like, for example, the tendency for sopranos portraying Brünnhilde to begin the final scene of Act III in *Die Walküre* defiantly, delivering the line “War es so schmälich was ich verbrach” as if for “exhibition purposes”, rather than starting “timidly”, as Wagner instructed. Seidl also criticized the practice of tenors in the role of Siegfried, when regaling the Gibichungs in Act III, Scene 2 in *Götterdämmerung* about his encounter with the Woodbird, of singing this passage in “an utterly unnatural comic falsetto tone, as if to make it seem as if a bird’s voice might be imitated by a tenor.”\(^{103}\) In his view, this manner of performance undermined the serious tone of the character’s impending death. The correct approach, the conductor advised, was that “Siegfried…did not twitter the words of the bird to the men, but told them in a simple manner what the bird had sung” because “the accompanying music conveys plainly enough the meaning of the song.”\(^{104}\) Seidl has also advised singers that the voice part need not always exactly mirror the orchestra in both volume and expression. For instance, at the end of Siegmund’s love song in Act I of *Die Walküre* (“vereint sind Liebe und Lenz!”) when the orchestra diminishes to a piano, the voice part, though also at piano, should maintain an “exuberant joy and vernal vivacity.” This kind of understanding, he further clarifies, can only be attained if one seeks to read “between the lines” of the score to determine the appropriate

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\(^{102}\) Op. cit., 246–47. Prior to her engagement at the Metropolitan Opera, Brandt had worked closely with Seidl in Europe for performances of the *Ring* and *Parsifal*. She met him for the first time in 1876, in Bayreuth; according to her, he was one of her prompters when she replaced Luise Jaide as Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung* for the second cycle of performances. In 1881, Seidl helped her prepare the part of Kundry for *Parsifal*. After the 1882 Bayreuth Festival, she sang, for the first time under Seidl’s leadership, as Brünnhilde in the Neumann production of *Die Walküre* at Berlin’s Victoria Theatre. She was subsequently engaged by Neumann and Seidl to sing for some months on the European *Ring* tour when Therese Vogl was not available.

\(^{103}\) Finck, *Anton Seidl*, 211.

\(^{104}\) Seidl commended Albert Niemann as one of the few singers who interpreted this part correctly (Niemann sang the role at the Metropolitan Opera House during the 1887–88 season); op.cit., 211–12. See also Katherine R. Syer’s brief discussion about the same passage in her essay “From Page to Stage”, in *Richard Wagner and His World*, 20.
interpretation, which he described as “style”. With the Ring cycle in particular, Seidl found that ultimately, “its measure of success is in exact ratio with the style in which it is produced.”

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On the relationship between Seidl and the Metropolitan Opera’s orchestra, unfortunately very little is known. Seidl did not reveal in his extant writings his opinions on the ensemble he conducted, nor are there any known anecdotes from musicians who played under him during this period. Furthermore, since the orchestral part was not usually the focus of opera (despite its central role in Wagnerian music drama), critics rarely reported in detail about how the orchestra performed. They tended to give only broad assessments, and in the case of Seidl, they consistently raved about his interpretative skill and direction, and commended the ensemble for their execution of Wagner’s difficult scores. Lest we think perhaps that the critics were over-stating the excellence of Seidl’s orchestra, it is worth noting that as far as late-nineteenth-century opera orchestras go, he probably had some of the best musicians in New York available to him at the Metropolitan Opera House. For the German seasons, they were most likely recruited from the late Leopold Damrosch’s New York Symphony, which, since its founding in 1878, had become an established ensemble whose performances rivaled the professional quality of Theodore Thomas’s orchestra. Many players were German-American immigrants, including one of the concertmasters of this period, Nahan Franko (1861–1930), who had studied with Joseph Joachim and August Wilhelmj, the concertmaster of Wagner’s Bayreuth orchestra in 1876. Victor Herbert (1859–1924), the Irish-born, German-raised musician and composer, was also in the company’s orchestra, as its principal cellist from 1886 onwards. He and Seidl later became close friends. Seidl rehearsed his musicians rigorously, in keeping with the precedent set by Leopold Damrosch. Moreover, many of these musicians, by this time, had

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105 Finck, Anton Seidl, 212.
106 See Anna Mischakoff Heiles’s study, American Concertmasters, Detroit Monographs in Musicology/Studies in Music, No. 51 (Sterling Park, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2007). See also: http://www.stokowski.org/Principal_Musicians_Metropolitan_Opera.htm#Concertmasters Index Point.
fairly extensive experience with Wagner’s music, including the *Ring*, having frequently performed excerpts in American concert halls. Critics often compared this German orchestra to Abbey’s for the 1883–1884 season, which had been assembled from Italian ensembles and was felt to be less skilled and under-rehearsed.

Concerning the size of the orchestra Seidl conducted at the Metropolitan Opera House, there is little information. Most likely the ensemble was quite a bit smaller than the 116 musicians who first performed the *Ring* in Bayreuth in 1876. What is known for certain is that for some time, the orchestra did not play in a sunken (let alone covered) pit, but in front of the stage on the same level as the parquet. (The Metropolitan Opera House did have an orchestra pit, but it was not lowered until the fall of 1889.) Therefore, the American premieres of the individual *Ring* operas, as well as the first complete cycle in the U.S., were performed in the then-customary manner of the orchestra exposed. This practice, however, did not appear to bother American audiences, despite what they now knew about the construction of the *Festspielhaus* and Wagner’s theories, for they would not have expected the Metropolitan Opera House to exactly mimic the conditions at Bayreuth.

Extant sources from Seidl’s pre-U.S. period such as his 1876 scenic notebook do suggest that he was very observant of the composer’s markings in the orchestral score, and that he sought to draw from his ensemble all the subtleties of dynamic range and color. Various anecdotes about his conducting during his American years appear to confirm this; as the soprano Lillian Nordica, who portrayed Brünnhilde in American performances of the *Ring* near the end of the nineteenth century, once remarked: “Mr. Seidl was the first to bring out the degrees of shading exactly as Wagner wrote them, and how many pianos and pianissimos he placed in his scores—and how many conductors have said that it was impossible to give them!”\footnote{Finck, *Anton Seidl*, 48.} According to others who heard Seidl conduct, he guided the orchestra as if it was a single, though malleable, entity, an equivalent partner in the drama occurring on stage. He was
ever conscious of the volume of the ensemble, making sure that it never drowned out the singers. Seidl even urged conductors to take into account the acoustics of the concert hall or theatre when performing Wagner opera, and to adjust their tempi accordingly to ensure that all musical details can be heard. As he explained in his essay:

Very often it is the size of the room and its acoustic qualities that are to blame for the fact that the means adopted [by the conductor] to carry out his idea, the means in which his orchestra has been drilled, produce an effect almost diametrically opposite to his intentions. The larger the room the broader must be his tempi to be understood in all parts of the house. The better the acoustics of the room the easier will be the conductor's task, the more pliant the orchestra. To illustrate: I brought forward Tristan und Isolde in New York in the season of 1895–1896, after the most careful preparation. The orchestral colors were adjusted for Jean and Edouard de Reszke and Madame Nordica, whose voices were always heard through the instrumental surge, as ought to be the case in every respectable performance of a Wagnerian drama. At the Auditorium in Chicago [built in 1889] I was obliged to tone down the volume of the same admirable orchestra nearly one-half, because I discovered that the acoustics of the Auditorium were so excellent that the dynamic volume employed in New York would have drowned the singers beyond hope of rescue. The orchestra sounded magical, and the performance revolutionized the ideas of all the artists.\footnote{Op. cit., 229.}

No doubt Seidl's ability to adapt the tempi of his performances according to variations in theatre acoustics benefitted from his vast experience conducting the Ring cycle on tour, at venues across Europe, and later in the U.S., when the production from the Metropolitan Opera was taken to five American cities. He evidently understood that for the Ring operas to succeed beyond Bayreuth, differences in stage design and technology were needed as well as flexibility in the performance of the music. We cannot of course know exactly how Seidl's views about conducting and staging the Ring evolved during his many years in the United States. It seems safe to assume, however, that during his career in America, Seidl remained true to the responsibility of being a "conductor/stage director", the role he had been groomed for by Wagner.
CHAPTER V: Early American Stagings of the *Ring* Cycle: Bayreuth as Model

“I believe that I am not talking pro domo in asserting that the New York public has reason to be more than satisfied with the local production of the Nibelung’s Ring. […] A whole no will be able to assert that the productions were not strictly in accordance with the master’s intention.”

---Anton Seidl

Anton Seidl fulfilled the dream that Wagner sometimes longed to accomplish but could not achieve: to bring the *Ring* cycle across the Atlantic to the United States. With his expert guidance of nearly every aspect of the Metropolitan’s productions, American audiences had every reason to expect that they experienced reasonably authoritative performances of the *Ring* during the German seasons. As the tenor Anton Schott described, “I became convinced that [Seidl] was, indeed, the only one who had penetrated the innermost secrets of the Tetralogy, and that no other conductor would have succeeded in what he accomplished so surprisingly.”

But what exactly did Americans see and hear when the *Ring* operas were performed for the first time at the Metropolitan Opera? To begin to answer this question, three key aspects of the early American production of these works are examined in this chapter: 1) the text and music that were performed; 2) the singers who portrayed the major roles of the operas; and 3) the stage technology at the Metropolitan Opera that facilitated the various scenic effects. While the American performances were not exactly like the 1876 Bayreuth production, the original was nevertheless influential, in look and in sound. This was not unintentional; indeed, Edmund Stanton sought to imbue his company’s performances with a Bayreuth aura and establish their credibility by hiring German singers and stage managers already experienced with the Wagnerian method of opera performance and production. These artists formed the vital transatlantic connection that inextricably tied the early performance history of the *Ring* in the United States to the cycle’s European origins.

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Part I: Performing the *Ring* in the New World: Text and Music

In the late nineteenth century, it was common for stagings of the *Ring* operas (outside of Bayreuth) to be abridged versions of the original. As discussed in Chapter 3, while Wagner clearly preferred the complete operas—and the entire cycle—to be performed, he did reluctantly allow cuts and other adjustments to be made, in the interest of allowing impresarios and conductors to adapt the work for their theatres and their audiences. His tolerance for such modifications, especially of the *Ring*, seemed primarily motivated by the concern that the cycle’s operas would be misrepresented and/or misunderstood by the audience through less-than-adequate performances.\(^3\) This was the case with *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, in which he sanctioned the excision of certain parts, in order to accommodate singers who had limited acting talent or vocal stamina to deliver lengthy scenes.

At New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, Seidl implemented the same cuts with Stanton’s company as with the European performances he conducted. Even for the U.S. premiere of the complete cycle in 1889, the alterations were maintained. For his part, Seidl heartily disliked using them, for he felt it was pandering to the desires of American audiences who did not wish to sit through tedious scenes or listen to operas more than four hours in length. In his view, he did not think that the cuts actually saved time and that ultimately, the shortened versions resulted in a reduced understanding of the operas. As he argued:

The public may believe me when I say that any cut, no matter how short, does not save as much time as will compensate for the less thorough understanding of the opera therefrom resulting. Taking as an example in the second act of the Walküre, the much-decried narrative of Wotan, I declare that the spectators who hear nothing, or only part of this narrative, cannot get at the very kernel of the whole opera, which lies at that narrative. The public can in that case appreciate the beauty of the music alone. The

\(^3\) According to his 1869 essay, *Über das Dirigiren (On Conducting)*, Wagner had previously been far less tolerant of cuts, finding that conductors employed them in order to hide their incompetence: “[B]y its aid they establish a satisfactory equilibrium between their own incompetence, and the proper execution of the artistic tasks before them. They remember the proverb: “What I know not, burns me not!” and the public cannot object to an arrangement so eminently practical.” In his view, their ineptitude stemmed from not grasping the principle that the tempi must be flexible “if an intelligible rendering is to be obtained.” Thus, if conducted with the correct tempi, a performance does not require abbreviation. See Wagner’s discussion in the case of *Die Meistersinger*, in Edward Dannreuther’s translation of the essay (London: William Reeves, 1940; repr. 1972), 99–102.
action is unfolded before its eyes, but the “why” of the plot is not made clear. I know a
good many highly cultured friends of music, musicians themselves, who are unable to
narrate to me correctly the plot of the Walküre. And yet here come persons who ask me
to reduce the evenings to three hours each. To such a request no answer is possible.⁴

But Seidl’s personal opinions aside, he probably understood that the cuts were necessary to
attract and maintain American interest in these early performances of the Ring. Abridged
versions of the Ring operas became the norm at the Metropolitan Opera House, and with the
exception of several uncut cycles in 1899 and 1900, they continued to be given in abbreviated
form until well into the twentieth century. It is therefore worth examining the textual and musical
modifications that were made to the Ring operas, in order to better understand how Americans
audiences generally experienced them in performance during this period.

**Modifications to the Scores of the Ring Operas for American Performance**

**Das Rheingold**

Without the availability of Seidl’s conducting score and/or production notes to the
American stagings of Das Rheingold, it is difficult to ascertain whether any cuts were made to
this opera. There was also no mention made in newspaper reviews and program notes of the
time concerning modifications; if there were any, they were likely minor alterations either not
worth mentioning by critics or were undetected by them. According to the cast lists in the
programs, as compiled by Gerald Fitzgerald et al, no singing roles were excised.⁵ The only
significant change from the original Bayreuth performance was the insertion of an intermission
between Scenes 2 and 3. Why a break was created in the middle of this scenic transformation is
not explicitly explained anywhere, though the reason more likely has to do with late-nineteenth-
century social expectations concerning the opera-going experience than the technological
limitations of the Metropolitan’s stage. In other words, the scheduling of an interval was intended

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to appease audiences, who, at this time, were probably not accustomed to seeing an opera two-and-a-half hours long without a break. This practice was not unique to the early American performances of Das Rheingold; during their 1882–1883 tour, Neumann’s “Traveling Wagner Theatre” troupe also performed the opera with an intermission. Whether this was done consistently for all performances on the tour is unknown but it was certainly implemented when the company brought the cycle to Italy.  

Die Walküre

Like for Das Rheingold, Seidl’s conducting score and production notes to Die Walküre are also no longer extant, so details about specific alterations (if any) that were made to this opera for the American performances remain unknown. One can, however, get some sense of what they were from critics who pointed them out in their reviews. The Metropolitan Opera premiere of Die Walküre conducted by Leopold Damrosch in the first German season (1884–1885), for example, was likely an uncut performance, because journalists had made pointed remarks that the performance took four hours to complete, along with thirty-minute intermissions between each Act. However, when Seidl conducted the work in 1886, he employed cuts to streamline portions of the opera. The critic of the New York Times welcomed the excisions, especially parts that were, in his view, uninteresting to American audiences, such as the extended dialogue between Wotan and Fricka in the first scene of Act II. As he wrote in a mid-November review:

The score has been cut with a free hand in the representation at the Metropolitan, and such wearisome numbers as are intended to illustrate the contention between Wotan and Fricka, and to rehearse for the benefit of the listener as well as for Brünnhilde’s edification, some events in Wotan’s early history, were judiciously abbreviated last night. The fine passages in the first love duet, the tenor’s song in the same act, the scene

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6 For example, a twenty-minute intermission was inserted between Scenes 2 and 3 when Das Rheingold was premiered in Venice. See Chapter 11 of John Barker’s study, Wagner and Venice (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008).
7 Intermissions for Metropolitan Opera performances were usually twenty-five minutes long but according to the program booklet for this performance of Die Walküre, an extra five minutes per intermission was required in order to prepare the scenery for each subsequent Act.
between Brünnhilde and Siegmund, the “Walkürenritt,” and the “fire scene” were enjoyed the more keenly for the excision—to the probable exasperation of the thoroughbred Wagnerite—of much that is tedious and farfetched in the opera as first brought out.  

Otherwise, *Die Walküre* appeared to be affected by cuts only to a minor extent, as no roles or complete sections were excised.

**Siegfried**

Beginning with its American premiere on November 9, 1887, *Siegfried* was usually performed in an abridged version, during the Metropolitan Opera’s German seasons. The cuts that Seidl likely employed in these performances are documented in a pocket-sized copy of the printed libretto to the opera, which remains part of his collection currently held at Columbia University. In this book, Seidl crossed out sections of text that could be removed for performances, if necessary. He also provided annotations as to why and in what situation such a cut would be made. According to the short letter he scrawled in the opening pages of the libretto, Seidl’s notes were intended for the singers of *Siegfried* (“Dem Sänger zum Werk!”). As he further explains, the cuts had been given to him by Wagner originally for the 1879 performances of the *Ring* cycle in Vienna. Subsequently, they were implemented by Neumann’s itinerant Wagner company, so to prevent the singers from being overtaxed as they had to give over a hundred, near-consecutive performances on their European tour. However, to ensure that Wagner’s desires were perfectly clear, Seidl noted that these cuts were solely intended for “ordinary performances” of *Siegfried* outside of Bayreuth, and were otherwise not authorized by the composer for future performances of the *Ring* at the Festspielhaus.

A full transcription and translation of Seidl’s notes as well as the text marked for excision is provided in Appendix E. In total, there are fifteen major cuts indicated for *Siegfried*, which is equivalent to just over five hundred measures of music; there may have also been minor cuts to

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9 The libretto was published by Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1876. It is held in Box 3, Folder 30 of the Seidl Archives, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.
the score although these were not cited in the copy of the libretto. It appears the primary reasons for implementing these cuts were: 1) to streamline some of the scenes that contained substantial dialogue, and 2) remove parts that may have been too difficult for the technical and acting abilities of some singers, particularly those who were employed at opera houses outside of Bayreuth.

The first two cuts are portions from Siegfried’s part in Act I, Scene 1. The first of these occurs after Siegfried has just smashed the sword that Mime had tried to weld together for him. Here the hero vents his suspicion and anger about his caretaker. The second cut comes later in the scene, after Siegfried asks Mime several questions regarding his origins. Mime reveals to him the now-broken sword, stating that he was given the weapon by Siegfried’s mother (Sieglinde) to which Siegfried responds that he wants Mime to forge it again. The part marked for exclusion is Siegfried’s extended warning to Mime of what he would do to the dwarf if he is not able to complete the task. Both these sections of text serve to sharpen the contentious relationship between the two characters and help to convey Siegfried’s rather unrefined and volatile personality. While these parts may have been selected for removal because they were felt to be not essential to the overall narrative of the scene, it is more likely the cuts were for the benefit of singers portraying Siegfried who struggled with these passages, which are technically quite difficult. Situated in the high tenor range, the vocal part features wide ascending and descending leaps, often as large as an octave.

In Scene 2 of Act I, the cuts Seidl indicated (labeled nos. 3 and 4) clearly serve to streamline the dialogue between The Wanderer and Mime. These occur within measures of each other and together, they shorten The Wanderer’s slow advance towards Mime by 39 measures, from his entrance to the hearth of the cave, as indicated by Wagner’s stage directions. While Seidl did not specify in the libretto further cuts to this scene, it appears there may have been additional excisions that took place during the American performances.
According to his review of the American premiere of *Siegfried*, the critic of the *New York Times* thought Seidl was prudent to shorten the “game of riddles” between Mime and The Wanderer to help maintain dramatic interest:

The scene of the questioning between Wotan and Mime in the first act covers nearly 30 pages in the piano score, and only two lines of it are of significance in the drama. [...] The long scene between Mime and the Wanderer, which Herr Seidl judiciously cut down, is musically significant, though dramatically tiresome.\(^{10}\)

Similarly, the cut Seidl marked for Act I, Scene 3 (labeled as no. 5) serves to help drive the narrative more quickly to the dramatic crux of the dialogue between Siegfried and Mime. What is removed in this case is Mime’s gradual psychological transformation as he emerges from his previously disturbed state at the beginning of this scene to his treacherous plotting as he contemplates how to teach Siegfried the concept of fear.

For Act II, Seidl marked four major cuts (nos. 6, 7, 8, and 9) in the first and third scenes. The first two are from the conversation between Alberich and The Wanderer, and include the dwarf’s long monologue deriding the latter about his aspirations for world supremacy, and later, his accusation of the latter’s meddling with destiny by breeding heroes to do his will. Taken together, these parts essentially point to past events from *Das Rheingold* that involved these two particular characters. Concerning the first of these, Seidl noted that this cut would not be necessary if there was a singer with strong vocal and acting skills in the role of the dwarf. Alberich’s music here is especially challenging, being in the high part of the bass-baritone range, and Wagner’s stage directions call for the singer to go from *wütend* (furious) at “den Ring mir nochmals zu rauben”, then quickly to *höhnisch* (mockingly) at “doch wo du schwach bist”. The second cut, starting at m. 293, is shorter, though also challenging vocally and histrionically. Here, Wagner has instructed the singer to deliver “Wie dunkel sprichst du” in an animated manner (*Belebter*), then “die traut deinem Blute entblüht” in a mocking tone (*höhnisch*), and finally, “die du—nicht brechen darf’st?” with “increasing vehemence” (*immer heftiger*).

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\(^{10}\) *New York Times*, 10 Nov 1887, 4.
Two of the briefest cuts to *Siegfried* (nos. 8 and 9) occur in the third scene of Act II, at the end of Siegfried and Mime’s long dialogue in which the former uncovers (by way of insight via dragon’s blood) the latter’s treacherous plot to take the ring from him. The first cut eliminates Mime’s insincere expression of concern for Siegfried’s health just before he commands the hero to drink a potion he had concocted to kill him. The second cut happens shortly afterward, after Siegfried has slain the dwarf; the portion excised is the hero’s brief outburst after he throws the body of the now-dead Mime into Fafner’s cave. Although Seidl has not provided an explanation for why these two sections, totaling 28 measures, were recommended for removal, a few reasons might be surmised from examining the score. The first cut may have been employed to aid the singer of Mime, whose part here presents a histrionic challenge. Between the beginning of Mime’s response at m. 1601 (the cut starts at m. 1607) until m. 1621 (the end of the cut), Wagner has indicated no less than six different instructions to guide interpretation: from “Wüthen ärgelich” (furiously angry), to “Er bemüht sich den zärtlichsten Ton anzunehmen” (striving to adopt the most tender expression), then “Mit sorglichster Deutlichkeit” (with the most meticulous clarity), to “Mit dem Ausdruck herzlicher Besorgtheit für Siegfried’s Gesundheit” (with an expression of sincere concern for Siegfried’s health), then “Sanft” (gently), to finally “wieder Scherzend” (joking again). Perhaps Wagner had felt that if the singer could not portray these highly varied emotions effectively, the cut was necessary. The second of these cuts, the deletion of Siegfried’s mocking tribute to the dead dwarf, might have been implemented to accommodate the physical limitations of the staging, that is, should the hero’s disposal of Mime’s body could not be done in the way Wagner intended (i.e. tossed into the cave). The stage action here may have been condensed so that instead of Siegfried performing the separate actions of disposing Mime’s body and covering the cave’s entrance with the dragon’s carcass as Wagner specifically directs in the score, the singer would only have to roll the dragon’s body to the cave, thus minimizing physical strain on the singer.\footnote{11 Wagner’s directions in the score for the singer portraying Siegfried are particularly demanding, physically and...}
For Act III, six cuts are indicated in Seidl’s copy of the libretto. The first (no. 10) is in Scene 1, in which The Wanderer has summoned Erda from her slumber. The portion excised is Erda’s specific reference to the Norns, instructing The Wanderer to ask them for their insight instead of awakening her. Wotan’s immediate response to the earth goddess (“Im Zwange der Welt weben die Nornen”) is also dropped. This small section was likely removed because it is the first mention of the Norns in the tetralogy, and the Norns’ Scene from the Prologue of Götterdämmerung was commonly omitted in performances of that opera, including for the American performances between 1888 and 1891. Thus, the cut ensured the logical unity of these two parts of the Ring, whether they were performed individually or as part of the whole cycle. More significant was the cut made for the presentations of Siegfried during the American tour of the Ring in April 1889, in which the role of Erda was removed, and thus, the entire first scene of Act III was not performed.

The longest cut in Siegfried (no. 11) is in Act III, Scene 2, from which eighty-nine measures of the dialogue between The Wanderer and Siegfried were removed. In this section, The Wanderer asks Siegfried a number of questions about the sword Nothung, to ascertain whether Siegfried would be the one to return the ring to the Rhine and bring about the end of the gods. In the general dramatic context of the opera, their exchange recalls earlier events. Perhaps this part was removed to streamline the scene and omit some repetitive elements, while preserving the energy of the singers, particularly the one portraying Siegfried, whose part in the final scene of Act III is especially difficult.

The remaining four cuts (nos. 12–15) recorded by Seidl are from the third scene of Act III: Siegfried’s and Brünnhilde’s first meeting and subsequent love duet. According to the musically, in this section. Notably, the singer must perform two separate physical acts of strength and sing, within the span of 33 measures. Ten measures before Siegfried sings “In der Höhle hier…”, he is instructed to “snatch up” Mime’s body, carry it to the outside of Falfer’s cave, and then throw the body down the cave (“Er rufft Mime’s Leichnam auf and trägt ihn auf die Anhöhe vor der Eingang der Höle. Während er den Leichnam in die Höle hinab wirft.”) Following his address to the dead Mime, Siegfried then rolls the dragon’s body so it covers the cave entrance completely (“Er wälst mit grosser Anstrengung den Leichnam des Wurmes vor den Eingang der Höle, so dass er diesen ganz damit verstopft.”) In both cases, the music clearly dictates when the actions are to be performed.
conductor’s various annotations here, these excisions appeared to have been recommended to relieve less-experienced singers of some exceptionally challenging music. The first of these excisions is a small section from Siegfried’s monologue as he is becoming overwhelmed with the sight of the sleeping Brünnhilde in front of him. The second cut, lasting 72 measures, is a part of the initial dialogue between Brünnhilde and Siegfried following the Valkyrie’s awakening. Here, Seidl has indicated that this portion is unfortunately often omitted from performance, because most singers in the role of Brünnhilde do not—or cannot—sing it, under the pretext that they need the stamina to execute the more strenuous phrases that occur later. In a similar vein, cuts 14 and 15 were meant to alleviate the difficulty of Siegfried’s part for the tenor.

_Götterdämmerung_

As far as it can be determined from contemporary reviews, nearly all American performances of _Götterdämmerung_ between 1888 and 1891, including its premiere in January 1888, were given with cuts. Among the most significant excisions was the entire Norns’ Scene; the opera began instead with the emergence of Siegfried and Brünnhilde from their rocky chamber, thus picking up from the end of the love duet at the conclusion of _Siegfried_. The Act I, Scene 3 dialogue between Waltraute and Brünnhilde was also completely removed. In addition, the haunting dialogue between Alberich and Hagen at the beginning of Act II was considerably truncated in some performances, or entirely eliminated, as it more often was, including for the first U.S. presentation of the cycle in March 1889. In the opinion of the _New York Times_’s critic, Seidl had liberally employed these cuts in order to accommodate the predilections of the American audience:

> The drama was subjected to considerable cutting in order to bring it within limits conducive to the comfort of the audience. In addition to the Nornir and the Waltraute scenes, which were not given last year, the Alberich scene was also omitted. Moreover, Herr Seidl had cut out many short passages here and there.\(^\text{12}\)

> These edits were in fact previously sanctioned by Wagner for “ordinary performances” of

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the opera outside of Bayreuth. He first made the decision to allow them in the summer of 1878, when Neumann staged *Götterdämmerung* in Leipzig. According to Cosima, Wagner's main reason for doing so was his concern that if particular scenes—such as the first part of the Prologue with the Norns, and the dialogue between Waltraute and Brünnhilde in Act I—were performed poorly, they would undermine the dramatic effectiveness of the rest of the opera and furthermore, confuse audiences. As she recorded on July 12:

Discussing at lunch the performance in Leipzig and the division of *Götterdämmerung*. Into an introduction and three acts, he decides after all to leave it as it is and just to make some cuts—almost the whole of the Norns’ scene and a large part of the scene between Waltraute and Brünnhilde. He does this because he knows that when badly performed, they are bound to be incomprehensible, and he would rather not sacrifice the transition to the “Journey to the Rhine,” which he knows to be effective; he would have to do this if the introduction were to be separated from the first act. Even here [in Bayreuth] the Norns’ scene and the Br.-Walt. scene proved unsuccessful, he says, so how much more likely are they to fail in an ordinary theater.\(^\text{13}\)

It bears mentioning that the poor reception of these two particular scenes in 1876 had troubled Wagner and he contemplated reworking them after the cycle’s premiere. They were actually among the substantial revisions he had made to the text of *Siegfrieds Tod* in 1852, so it must have disheartened him to recommend that they now be excised, if necessary, in performance.\(^\text{14}\) As a possible improvement, Wagner had considered changing the architecture of the Prologue and Act I of *Götterdämmerung*, by creating a definitive break between them. As Cosima noted:

I mention the scene between Waltraute and Brünnhilde and observe that—as wonderful as it is—it does prove tiring, because already too much music had been heard before it; R. agrees with me and decides to divide up the 1st act, to make a long pause after the introduction and begin the act with the orchestral “Siegfried’s Journey.” In this way *Götterdämmerung* would be a repetition of the whole, an introduction and 3 parts.\(^\text{15}\)

In the end, however, he did not carry out his intentions and decided to preserve “Siegfried’s

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ene\(^\text{13}\) CWD 2, 112.  
\(^\text{14}\) Wagner’s revisions in 1852 to his prose texts to *Siegfrieds Tod* and *Der junge Siegfried* (from 1848 and 1851, respectively) are well known in scholarship but as Feng-Shu Lee has recently pointed out, few have investigated why the composer made them and their impact on the evolution of the *Ring*’s text at this time. In her dissertation, Lee has discussed these alterations in light of Wagner’s changing conception of the ending to the *Ring* cycle; see Chapter 2 of “Ending the *Ring*” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, June 2011).  
\(^\text{15}\) Entry for Saturday, 9 Sept 1876; CWD 1, 921.
Rhine Journey” as an orchestral transition between the prologue and the first Act, convinced of its musical and dramatic effectiveness.

Reception of Abridgements

In performances of the Ring operas today, cuts to the score would be considered unacceptable (even sacrilegious) by the audiences that see them. However, nineteenth-century American audiences protested very little about the abridged versions given by Stanton’s company at the Metropolitan Opera. To be sure, some Americans must have known about the adaptations that were performed in Europe and were readily accepted by audiences there. On the other hand, it might be possible that the general public attending the American performances during the German seasons were basically unaware of the cuts, unless they were well-acquainted with the scores. There was no indication in the program books distributed by the Metropolitan Opera that the audience would not hear or see certain parts of the cycle’s operas. For instance, for performances of Götterdämmerung, the roles of the Norns, Alberich, and Waltraute were simply omitted from the program’s cast list without explanation. Thus, if Americans did become aware they saw a truncated Siegfried, they likely learned about the alterations through the critics who discussed them in their reviews.

Remarkably, most—if not all—of the American critics at this time openly welcomed the edits used for the New York performances and in the touring performances as well. In fact, they praised Seidl for streamlining the plots of Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung, notably, for making “intelligent” and “judicious” cuts, such as the removal of sections that were repetitive, or were not felt to be vital to the overall drama. The critic of the Chicago Tribune, for example, cited fourteen abbreviations in Die Walküre, including those in the Act II scenes between Wotan and Fricka, and Brünnhilde and Wotan, about which he felt “the audience was spared the wholly unnecessary relation by Wotan of matters pertaining to the ring and which
were already sufficiently well known,” at least by those who were familiar with Das Rheingold.\footnote{\textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 24 Apr 1889, 5.} He felt that an even greater number of (small) cuts could have been made without sacrificing the dramatic continuity of the opera. Similarly, critics applauded the cuts to Siegfried that Seidl had applied in European performances, noting that the resulting opera was rid of some parts felt to be tiresome, such as the Act I dialogue between Mime and The Wanderer, the scene between Erda and The Wanderer in Act II (though this was performed in Philadelphia), and Siegfried’s encounter with The Wanderer, which was shortened to bring the action immediately to the breaking of Wotan’s spear. The minor excisions made to the Act III love duet of Brünnhilde and Siegfried appeared to have been virtually unnoticed by most critics (or were expected so they did not require commentary), except Louis Elson of the Boston Daily Advertiser, who lamented the loss. Several journalists seemed relieved that Götterdämmerung was purged of its darker and more somber moments, like the opening prologue with the Norns, Waltraute’s visit with Brünnhilde, and Alberich’s eerie night call on a sleeping Hagen. The Chicago Inter-Ocean writer mentioned that the latter scene was omitted because of its “sinister” and “blood-curdling” features. The Norns’ Scene was usually cited as extraneous to the drama; as in the view of the New York Times’s critic:

This is a judicious piece of pruning, for [this] scene is utterly without dramatic value, and is musically only a prelude. The opera is extremely long, and certain parts of it, which are dramatically necessary, are musically a bore, and Herr Seidl has shown unusual good sense in cutting these portions down.\footnote{\textit{New York Times}, 26 Jan 1888, 5.}

The journalist of the Chicago Daily Tribune also thought it wise to leave this scene out, not because it seemed dull, but because it was difficult to achieve an effective staging of the Norns weaving the rope of destiny. In his opinion, this scene should probably be only performed in the “most favorable circumstances”, such as at Bayreuth.\footnote{\textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 26 Apr 1889, 5.} On the other hand, he did regret the omission of the scene with Waltraute and Brünnhilde, though he “acknowledged the wisdom of
its suppression” (he did not explain why). Only Henry Krehbiel of the New York Tribune defended with relative vigor the significance of the Norns’ Scene and the Waltraute Scene to the dramatic unity of the entire cycle. Nevertheless, he appreciated that “a public unfamiliar with German and unconcerned about Wagner’s deeper purposes can much more easily spare than endure them.”

Even passionate defenders of Wagner’s music, like Henry T. Finck, justified the cuts in performances of the Ring operas, deeming them necessary in order for the works to succeed with audiences outside Bayreuth. In his opinion, it was Seidl’s judicious use of cuts that helped to increase the operas’ popularity with the public, to the point that even Wagner could not deny the effectiveness of their application. As Finck explained to the readers of The Cosmopolitan,

Except at Bayreuth, Wagner’s later works did not especially prosper at first, because they were either too long or injudiciously cut. Herr Seidl, however, succeeded with them everywhere. One time Wagner wrote to him complaining that he made so many cuts in his operas. But Herr Seidl wrote back, giving his reasons, and explaining the situation; whereupon he received the laconic telegram for Wagner, “Schiessen sie los!” (fire away!)

Finck cited other practical reasons for performing truncated versions of the operas, at least in the American context. For one, the customary weekday schedule of an American (compared to a German’s, apparently) made it difficult for an opera performance to be scheduled any earlier than 8 pm:

In Germany the length of Wagner’s and Meyerbeer’s operas is not so objectionable as here, because there the opera commences at seven, or even at six thirty, and six, if it is a very long one; hence it is all over shortly after ten, and everybody has time to take supper before going to bed. But in New York, where it is not customary to sup, and where the dinner hour is between six and seven, it would hardly be advisable to commence the opera before eight. Nor is the interest in the opera sufficiently general to inspire the hope that for its sake any change will be made in the hour of dining.

Moreover, it was felt that the uncommon length of the uncut presentations of the Ring operas would be psychologically taxing, particularly after a long day’s work, and therefore, might

21 Ibid.
dissuade American audiences from attending subsequent presentations. With a good portion of
the opera audience being members of the working middle and upper-middle classes (including
businessmen, industrialists, and academics), there was probably some truth to this assumption.
As Finck elucidated,

The typical American works hard all day, whether he is rich or poor, and in the evening
his brain is too tired to follow for four hours the complicated orchestral score of a music
drama. If he listens attentively, he will be exhausted by eleven o’clock, and the last act,
which he might have enjoyed hugely if not so “played out,” will weary him so much that
he will probably resolve to avoid the opera in the future.22

The critic of the Chicago Daily Tribune further expounded that it is only under the special
conditions of the Bayreuth Festival, which Wagner originally conceived, that uncut performances
of the complete cycle could be given and where the audience would be in the correct frame of
mind to appreciate his operas. In his view,

It is an undeniable fact that each of the works, with the exception of the prologue, is too
long for use in its entirety upon the American stage, where, as the performances do not
begin until nearly 8 o’clock, without cuts they would last until after 12. The average opera
audience in this country cannot enter into the spirit of Wagner’s work to such an extent
as to render four or five hours of such continuous mental strain as would be demanded
by the unabridged dramas endurable, much less a source of enjoyment. It is far different
from Bayreuth, where the hearers do not come from the labors of a day filled with
business cares and anxieties and in a mental state that is more in need of rest and
relaxation than further tension, as in the case with many who attend the performances.
At Bayreuth the audience have temporarily left such cares behind, and the journey has
interposed a sort of wall of separation from the ordinary and harassing vocations of
everyday life.23

Evidently, both Finck and the Chicago critic thought that the experience of a live performance of
a Wagner opera was not one of mere entertainment, to escape the strains of the day, but
required a disposition of focused attention and mental effort.

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In general, the American public did not appear to take issue with the lack of complete
Bayreuth conditions at the Metropolitan Opera presentations of the Ring; the relative novelty of
the cycle’s operas at this time still made them, even if abridged, the most highly anticipated

23 Chicago Daily Tribune, 28 Apr 1889, 36.
performances during the German seasons. Overall, they were deemed to be major artistic—and to an extent, financial—achievements. An important contributing factor to their success was the reputation and experience of the artists who were hired for these productions.

Leopold Damrosch had set the example in the first German season by hiring reputable singers of Wagner opera (some of them trained by the composer himself) for the Metropolitan Opera’s first production of *Die Walküre*. The results did not disappoint: not only were these performances praised by critics for their high quality, but they also garnered the highest box office receipts of any opera at the Metropolitan for that season. Subsequently, when Edmund Stanton assumed managerial duties of the company, he saw it made good artistic and financial sense to hire excellent artists who truly understood—and had experience in—the Wagner method, to perform in his productions of the composer’s works. To interpret the major roles in the American stagings of the *Ring* operas, the artists Stanton imported to New York included several prominent singers who were previously involved with the cycle’s performances in Bayreuth, and throughout Germany and Europe. Others began their careers at the Metropolitan and later became renowned singers of Wagner's works on both sides of the Atlantic.

**Part II: The Singers of the American *Ring*, 1885-1891**

Each June, in preparation for the upcoming season, Edmund Stanton (with Walter Damrosch) traveled to Europe to engage singers for the Metropolitan Opera’s resident company. Not surprisingly, he sought those artists who were usually employed at prominent court or state opera houses in major German cities. It was, however, not always easy to hire the ones he wanted. According to several interviews published in the *New York Times*, Stanton discovered that the process of hiring German singers tended to be fraught with many logistical issues. Many of them were on permanent contracts with German theatres and had to be granted a “leave of absence” in order to sing elsewhere. As he once described:
The difficulty of engaging a first-class company of German singers is hardly appreciated on this side of the water, and, indeed, it can be properly appreciated only by those who have tried it. All the popular artists are attached to some one of the Court opera houses, and are held by iron-bound contracts. Many of them are looking forward to pensions which the Government provides for them after a certain term of service, and which they forfeit, of course, if they break their contracts and come to this country without securing leave of absence.24

Despite such obstacles, he was able to secure many highly-regarded German singers for the Metropolitan seasons, in part because they were attracted to better financial prospects in the United States or had an enterprising desire to enrich American culture.25

American audiences, however, had to be groomed to accept German artists, whose careers and reputations were often less widely known to them than the popular star singers of Italian opera productions. To encourage the public to see German-language opera at the Metropolitan, Stanton sought to establish the credibility of his company by speaking openly about the German origins and affiliations of the artists he hired. For instance, in an interview published in the New York Times in July 1885, he assured readers of the high quality of the singers he had employed for the upcoming season:

We labor under the disadvantage of being pioneers, so to speak, in giving grand German opera in this country, and artists who are known and admired all over Europe come to our shores comparatively unknown. The people whom I have engaged are singers of established reputation in the Court circles of Germany, and if they have not been heard of in America to any great extent it is because German opera is new to this country. Before the end of our next season the people of whom I have been telling you will be as well-known and appreciated here, I am sure, as the Italian singers who have been before the New York public for years.26

To make explicit their “German authority”, the name of each individual singer appeared in the Metropolitan Opera’s program booklets with the European or German opera house to which they were originally associated. The same data was also published in the newspapers, and it became common to see such details in the pre-season prospectus for each German season

25 As Jessica Gienow-Hecht has observed, German musicians, singers among them, “defined themselves, above all, through serious music” and “exhibited an almost missionary impulse to import it to their New World audiences.” For further discussion on this context, see Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 72.
between 1887 and 1890. An alphabetical list of the singers who were involved in the American Ring performances during this period and their known city and/or theatre affiliation is provided in Appendix F. As is evident from this table, the majority of the singers were employed by court or state opera houses in major German cities; at least a handful of them, however, were of American origin, including Sophie Traubmann and Ida Klein, whose careers were being launched at this time.

In other published interviews, Stanton sometimes elaborated in some detail on the careers and reputations of the company’s key singers by describing the lengths he went in order to secure these artists. For the Wagner repertoire, and notably, the Ring operas, he made sure to mention any significant prior experience his singers had had with these works, at Bayreuth or elsewhere in Germany. One notable example is his telling of how he acquired German soprano Lilli Lehmann for her first engagement at the Metropolitan Opera for the 1885–1886 season. As Stanton recalled, her celebratory status as a Wagnerian singer in Berlin and throughout Germany, initially created some challenges for her to come to New York:

Among the first of the new engagements which I made was that of Lilli Lehmann, soprano, and the leading prima donna of the Imperial Opera House at Berlin. All the time I was in Berlin people kept saying to me, ‘You must get Lilli Lehmann if you don’t get anybody else,’ and while they were saying this I was smiling to myself knowing that I had a contract in my pocket signed by this popular favorite. I had a great deal of trouble to secure her, nevertheless. The Directors of the Opera House, which is a Court theatre, refused to grant her a leave of absence, and finally, as a last resort, she appealed to the Emperor himself, with whom she is a great favorite. His Imperial Majesty listened to her appeal, and an order was issued to the Directors to grant her a year’s leave to come America. Her position in the Imperial Opera House is a life one, and but for the gracious intercession of his Majesty she would have been obliged to remain or to sacrifice her brilliant prospects in Germany. Lilli Lehmann is a very beautiful woman, with a fine voice which has been thoroughly trained. I should say she was about 38 years old, and she has been the favorite singer in Berlin for the last few years. Her repertoire is very extensive, and ranges from light to heavy roles. Among her greatest roles are Brunhilde [sic], in Die Walküre. . . . I am confident that she will gain as great a reputation here as she has attained in Germany.

27 See the following articles in the New York Times: 19 Jul 1885, 7; 27 Jun 1886, 14; 18 Aug 1886, 5; 10 Jul 1887, 4; 27 Jul 1887, 5; 29 Sep 1889, 4; 2 Oct 1889, 4.

28 Ibid. According to Lehmann, the Intendant of Berlin’s Imperial Opera House, Botho von Hülsen, granted her a leave of absence in order to appear in the 1885–1886 season at the Metropolitan Opera; later, she broke her contract willingly so she could be engaged by Stanton for subsequent seasons. See Lilli Lehmann, My Path
In many cases, Stanton’s hiring of Lehmann and other reputable German singers for the U.S. performances of Wagner’s operas led to these artists’ successful American careers. For the Ring operas, whereas minor roles tended to be filled by a frequently-changing roster of artists (usually up-and-coming European or American singers), Stanton otherwise tended to cast the same notable singers for the same major roles in each subsequent season. Lilli Lehmann, for instance, was the main interpreter of Brünnhilde in Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung, for five consecutive seasons (1885–1890). Emil Fischer, the German-American bass, was the sole performer of Wotan in Das Rheingold and Hagen in Götterdämmerung, and sang Wotan in most performances of Die Walküre and as The Wanderer in Siegfried. The Austrians Auguste Seidl-Kraus and Marianne Brandt were the primary singers for Sieglinde and Fricka respectively, in presentations of Die Walküre between 1885 and 1888. This arrangement of having singers reprise their roles for consecutive seasons must have given the American performances of the Ring operas a certain consistency in quality.

It should be noted, however, that the singers did not always occupy the same roles across the operas of the cycle, at least not for individual performances, nor even when the entire tetralogy was presented. When the complete Ring was given for the first time in the U.S. in March 1889, the role of Brünnhilde was sung by Fanny Moran-Olden in Die Walküre and Siegfried but by Lehmann in Götterdämmerung. In the ensuing touring presentations, Moran-Olden appeared as the Valkyrie only in Die Walküre while Lehmann assumed the part for Siegfried and Götterdämmerung. Other such “cross-opera” changes in casting for the touring production of the American Ring included that for the part of Siegfried, which was sung by Max Alvary for the third opera, but was portrayed by Paul Kalisch in the final part of the cycle. Likewise, Joseph Beck was Alberich for Das Rheingold but Ludwig Mödlinger played the dwarf Through Life, trans. by Alice Benedict Seligman (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1914), 323–24; 329–32; and 346–49. The German edition is entitled Mein Weg (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1914; repr.1920).

The cast lists for each performance can be found in Fitzgerald, Annals of the Metropolitan Opera.
in Siegfried. Some roles were completely excised for the purposes of the tour, such as Erda in Siegfried, which was sung by Louise Meisslinger in individual performances of the opera earlier in the season.

Many singers also took on multiple roles in the American presentations of the cycle. Besides Siegfried, Kalisch was the sole Siegmund for Die Walküre; Louise Meisslinger portrayed both Fricka and Gutrune; Hedwig Reil was both Erda and Flosshilde for Das Rheingold (the latter for Götterdämmerung also), as well as Waltraute in Die Walküre; Max Alvary did double duty as Loge and Siegfried; Joseph Beck was both Alberich and Gunther for the first and last of the Ring operas; and Eugene Weiss portrayed Fafner in Das Rheingold and in Siegfried, as well as Hunding in Die Walküre. This arrangement was not unusual or new, as even Wagner had casted some of his singers in several parts for the cycle’s world premiere in Bayreuth, including Luise Jaide as both Erda and Waltraute, and Lilli Lehmann as Woglinde, Helmwige, and the Woodbird. Most likely, the scheme arose as a practical solution to help limit costs of the production. In any case, critics and American audiences did not seem bothered by what might appear to be a minor infraction on Wagner’s principle about “maintaining illusion” when they saw the same artists assume different roles within the operas of the Ring.

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While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the specific involvement of every singer in the early American performances of Wagner’s Ring cycle, the contributions of several major German interpreters do merit examination. As the foremost interpreters of the work at the time, they not only brought their star power to the Metropolitan Opera House but also their prior experience performing the Ring operas in Bayreuth and Europe. These singers—along with Anton Seidl as conductor—became the most significant exporters of the “Wagner method”. Having worked directly with the composer and his artistic circle, they had acquired a certain practical knowledge of the entire artwork that could only be attained in their roles as performers. To this extent, they stood to shape American audiences’ expectations of how the
tetralogy should—or should not—be performed. Although the lack of production sources (such as annotated scores, production diaries, etc.) makes it difficult to assess exactly how these singers performed their various roles, a general idea may be gained by briefly examining their individual European and American performance histories with the Ring operas.

The Bayreuth Veterans

Among the singers in the early American presentations of the Ring operas during the Metropolitan Opera’s German seasons were several artists who had created specific roles for the cycle’s 1876 premiere in Bayreuth. They included the Austrian sopranos, Amalie Materna and Marianne Brandt, the German soprano Lilli Lehmann, and the German tenors Albert Niemann, Heinrich Vogl, and Heinrich Gudehus. While Materna, Vogl, and Gudehus sang only one season each at the Metropolitan, the others were employed for multiple seasons, thus establishing some consistency in the Ring operas’ stagings. Together, the reputations and expertise of these artists significantly contributed to the relative artistic and financial success of these performances and helped to generate considerable American interest in the works.

Amalie Materna (1844–1918)

Amalie Materna, the celebrated Austrian soprano, first came to the attention of Americans as Wagner’s original Brünnhilde for the 1876 premiere of the complete Ring cycle. She was initially recommended to the composer by Emil Scaria, a colleague of Materna’s at the Vienna Court Opera where she was permanently engaged. In August 1874, Wagner had selected her for the part of the Valkyrie. There was no doubt he greatly admired her musical abilities, but most of all, he appreciated her willingness to be molded by him in order to achieve his ideal that singers should act and sing in service to the drama. As he wrote in a lengthy letter to King Ludwig II in October 1874, regarding his casting of Materna:

I encountered great difficulties with the women’s roles, until the greatest difficulty of all was finally surmounted when friends drew my attention to Frau Materna in Vienna,
whom I have cast for the part of Brünnhilde. She is the only woman with the voice for this tremendous part; in addition she is fiery by nature, heroic in stature and has uncommonly eloquent features, but most of all she is of truly childlike devotion to me and my cause.\textsuperscript{30}

Materna’s performances as Brünnhilde at Bayreuth were invariably praised by critics around the world, including the American journalist, Frederick Schwab, of the \textit{New York Times}. In his review, Schwab praised her dramatic gifts and her singing skills, which to him bore the markers of Wagner’s ideal type of singer, that is, one with a powerful but agile voice with accurate intonation and clear declamation:

Most of the honors of the performance of “Die Walküre” were borne off by Frau Amalia [sic] Materna, who personated Brünnhilde. This artist, who appears to be about thirty-five years of age, and is tall and inclined to stoutness, has a soprano voice of exceeding richness and immense power. She uses it with little effort, and while her method savors less of the German school on account of the natural facility with which her tones are brought out, she has all the German vigor and a cleanness of articulation which cannot be too highly praised.\textsuperscript{31}

Following the 1876 Festival, Materna continued to be the key interpreter of Brünnhilde as she reprised the role in the first Vienna performances of \textit{Die Walküre} in 1877 and \textit{Siegfried} in 1878, as well as the 1881 Berlin premiere of the entire \textit{Ring} cycle at the city’s Victoria Theatre. In 1882 she sang the role of Kundry in the premiere of \textit{Parsifal} at the second Bayreuth Festival. That same year (and in 1884), Theodore Thomas invited her to the United States where she appeared as a soloist in his mammoth music festivals held in New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago. As discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, these concerts often included excerpts from Wagner’s operas, and for those from the \textit{Ring}, Materna sang the part of the Valkyrie. By the time she was hired by Leopold Damrosch for the Metropolitan Opera premiere of \textit{Die Walküre} in 1885, she was thus quite well known to Americans in that role. However, she did not return as a regular to the Metropolitan after this season, perhaps because her fees were quite high; according to Walter Damrosch, she demanded a salary of $1,000 a night, when she

\textsuperscript{30} Letter 426 in SL, 835.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{New York Times}, 31 Aug 1876, 4.
learned she was the Metropolitan directors’ first choice. For subsequent seasons, Stanton favored the younger Lilli Lehmann as Brünhilde over Materna, but this did not diminish the latter’s popularity with American audiences. Later, in 1894, the younger Damrosch engaged her for a charity performance of Götterdämmerung at Carnegie Hall, during a period when the Metropolitan was not presenting German opera. As he remembered, she was, by then, past her prime, but “still glorious.”

Marianne Brandt (1842–1921)

The Austrian mezzo-soprano Marianne Brandt (born Marie Bischoff) made her Bayreuth debut in 1876, replacing an indisposed Luise Jaide in the part of Waltraute in Götterdämmerung. Wagner thought Brandt, who was then employed at the Berlin Imperial Opera House, to be a talented singer, and had in fact, initially intended her for the role. However, the singer’s bristly personality and erratic behavior led to their often uneasy association. Entries in Cosima’s diaries about her husband’s dealings with Brandt provide some colorful detail about their professional relationship leading up to the first Bayreuth Festival. In August 1874, Brandt arrived in Bayreuth to study the role of Waltraute with Wagner (presumably, he had summoned her). She was deemed excellent in the part, but Brandt felt she should have a more substantial role. Six months later, in early February 1875, she wrote to Wagner requesting to play Fricka instead of Waltraute; Cosima replied, advising Brandt to keep the part originally assigned to her. The singer did not seem to take the news well for she sent Waltraute’s part back to the Wagners without explanation. For some time, nothing further was heard from Brandt, although it appears that around April 1876, she was offered the part of Sieglinde. Meanwhile, there were various criticisms about Brandt circulating among the other

33 See entry for Sunday-Tuesday, August 9–18, 1874 in CWD 1, 780–81. On Monday the 17th, Cosima wrote: “In the afternoon and in the morning R. works with Frl. Brandt and the singer Kneiss. In the evening the former delighted us with her Waltraute, whose narration moves us all deeply. But the good lady does not seem best pleased at having to sing what she calls a ‘small’ role.”
members of the Berlin theatre, including one about her rather homely physical appearance by Lilli Lehmann, who made her opinion known to Wagner in a letter. In his response, Wagner defended his choice of Brandt which, he explained, was based on her artistic competence, not her looks:

You have made a pretty difficulty for me! [...] Regarding Fräulein Brandt, I could have wished for a little more reasonableness from you all. It grew clear to me that she would stand higher in her artistic performance than any of the others with whom I had become acquainted. The unattractiveness of her physiognomy is important only off the stage, and for those who are most closely associated with her; it counts for nothing on the stage, and especially in my theatre, and her slender figure alone will have a good effect.  

Clearly, Wagner’s regard for Brandt’s talent was such that he continued to work with her, despite their volatile relationship. For the 1882 Bayreuth Festival, Wagner cast her as Kundry (a role she shared with Materna) for the second performance of Parsifal. Later that year, Brandt was engaged as a member of Neumann’s Traveling Wagner Theatre, for which she sang the part of Brünnhilde in a December performance of Die Walküre at Berlin’s Victoria Theatre. In March 1883, when the company was in Darmstadt, she portrayed the Valkyrie in a performance of Götterdämmerung.

Brandt was first brought to the United States by Leopold Damrosch for the Metropolitan Opera’s first German season during which, among other roles, she performed Fricka in Die Walküre. One critic, perhaps knowing something of her European career, felt that the role was below her exceptional talents but he praised her for having undertaken it, sacrificing her “star power” for the sake of supporting a strong ensemble cast. As he wrote: “Fräulein Brandt good-naturedly took upon herself the rather thankless duties of Fricka and she did so in the certainty

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35 Letter dated 26 Apr 1876; translated and printed in My Path Through Life, 205. See Cosima’s entries for 21, 24–25, 27 Apr 1876 in CWD 1, 902–04. Cosima apparently did not find Brandt to be particularly attractive either. In her entry for 16 Aug 1874, she recorded: “In the evening Frl. Brandt, musically very good and accomplished, but very unattractive, a Viennese child of the people, without any culture.”

36 For a further examination of Marianne Brandt’s working relationship with Wagner and her portrayal of Kundry for the 1882 Bayreuth Festival, see “Psychogramm einer Einzelgängerin: Marianne Brandt” in Chapter 3 of Stephan Mösch’s Weihe, Werkstatt, Wirklichkeit: Parsifal in Bayreuth 1882–1933 (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 2009), 117-27. Mösch’s transcribed various documents by Brandt, including a series of letters to her sister Pauline in which she recorded her experience of the rehearsal process and the performance during the summer of 1882.
that a finished representation of even so thankless a part would not fail of appreciation.”

Brandt stayed on for three more seasons in Stanton's company, returning as Fricka in *Die Walküre*, but also singing Erda and Wellgunde in the American premieres of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, respectively, in the 1887–1888 season. Neither of these latter parts though, were as significant as the roles in the *Ring* she was used to performing in Germany, and perhaps this was one of the reasons she did not return to New York the following year when the entire *Ring* was performed. However, she was featured in more prominent roles in other operas at the Metropolitan, through which Americans came to know her as an excellent dramatic artist with a large range that enabled her to sing a variety of soprano and mezzo-soprano roles. Noted for her supple voice with a deep and powerful tone and clear articulation, her particular qualities can still be heard in a few extant, primitive recordings from 1905 (though unfortunately, none of them contain music by Wagner).  

*Albert Niemann (1831–1917)*

During his illustrious career, the German tenor, Albert Niemann, earned particular renown on both sides of the Atlantic as Siegmund in *Die Walküre*. Prior to his creation of the role for the 1876 premiere of the Ring, he had already established himself as a significant Wagner tenor in the 1850s and 60s singing the title roles from the composer's earlier operas—*Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and *Rienzi*—in Hanover and Munich. He was later engaged at the Berlin Imperial Opera House (with Lilli Lehmann and Marianne Brandt), where he portrayed Walther in the city's premiere of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in 1870. In the spring of 1872, Wagner told Franz Betz he was considering Niemann for the part of Siegmund for the Bayreuth Festival, a decision he later confirmed in his October 1874 letter to King Ludwig II: “Niemann,”

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37 *New York Times*, 31 Jan 1885, 4. Brandt was praised earlier on in the season for her Metropolitan debut as Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

he wrote, “will be taking the part of Siegmund, a role that could have been written for him.” The tenor, however, preferred to portray Siegfried, but Wagner desired a younger-looking singer to play the hero. (This initially led to much friction between them during the summer rehearsals in 1875—mostly on Niemann’s part—but the tension was adequately resolved by the 1876 Festival.) According to Richard Fricke, in Niemann’s preparation of the role of Siegmund for the Ring’s premiere, the tenor willingly cooperated with him to seek the most effective and naturalistic gestures for key dramatic moments in Die Walküre, such as the drawing of the sword at the end of Act I. As Fricke remembered:

June 13. Wagner had to stay indoors, his infection was much worse. He welcomed me [Fricke], with a letter to Hans Richter, which he read to me. The gist of it was, he asked Richter to request Niemann to take over the direction of the first act of Die Walküre... The rehearsal went off well. Niemann had already realized the day before that the drawing of the sword from the ash tree was awkward. I told him: “First of all it is not natural—you would have to step to the opposite side. Further, the method for standing firm during that will have to be created.” Soon Niemann found the right way, and how his stance and the drawing out of the sword is most effective.

Niemann’s interpretation of Siegmund in the 1876 Bayreuth performances of Die Walküre was praised unreservedly by Wagner as well as by critics. Frederick Schwab of the New York Times reported that despite a decline in the quality of his voice (he suffered from hoarseness in parts of Act I), he was nevertheless a “highly accomplished artist.” In particular,

…his declamation is perfection itself, and hence his share of the first act, when Siegmund tells of his early life was as effective can be imagined. The delicate love-music of the opera lost somewhat of its charm through the quality of Herr Niemann’s tones, but the style of his performance left nothing to wish for.

Niemann subsequently reprised his celebrated portrayal of Siegmund for the first cycle given at Her Majesty’s Theatre in London, 1882, and for his New York debut at the Metropolitan Opera in November 1886. Regarding the latter performance, the American press was full of commendation, especially about Niemann’s exceptional display of what they considered to be

39 See SL, 789 and 835.
the “Wagnerian method” of singing. As one journalist wrote:

In person Herr Niemann is a man of tall and commanding appearance, his manner is stately and impressive, with no taint of theatrical affectation, and his look and hearing suggest to the observer that he is continuously alive to the action of the drama he is concerned in and thoroughly interested therein. His conception of Siegmund last night was pitched in a rather low key, the misery of the fugitive never being lost sight of completely, even when enthusiasm and love are supposed to prevail. It was carried out, however, with extreme simplicity, directness, and consistency, and left little doubt in the minds of the spectators as to Herr Niemann’s right to this position in the world of art. Vocally the new tenor gave abundant satisfaction by the methods and under the circumstances above referred to. His love-song, half sung, half declaimed, was rendered with most delicate expression and admirable effect; his delivery of the Wagnerian text was in itself, in truth, a delight throughout the opera.\textsuperscript{42}

That year, Niemann also sang the title role for the American premiere of \textit{Tristan und Isolde} at the Metropolitan, which garnered him further acclaim. The following season, Stanton invited him back for the \textit{Ring} operas as Siegmund once again and also as Siegfried in the American premiere of \textit{Götterdämmerung} (1888).

\textit{Heinrich Vogl (1845–1900)}

Of the three German tenors who were veterans of the \textit{Ring} and the Bayreuth Festival, Heinrich Vogl was the most experienced with multiple roles from the cycle’s operas. While he was engaged at the Munich Hofoper, Vogl created the roles of Loge in the world premiere of \textit{Das Rheingold} in September 1869 and Siegmund in \textit{Die Walküre} in June 1870; both productions were under the auspices of King Ludwig II.\textsuperscript{43} Wagner initially expressed to the King in 1868 that he thought Vogl was a “thoroughly incompetent singer” but he later revised his opinion and selected the tenor to reprise his portrayal of the fiery demi-god for the 1876 Bayreuth Festival. (Vogl’s wife, Therese (1845–1921), who was Sieglinde to her husband’s Siegmund in Munich, was also granted the same part for Wagner’s Bayreuth production, but had to withdraw in early 1876 on the account of her pregnancy.) Various reports of the \textit{Ring}'s

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{New York Times}, 11 Nov 1886, 5.
\textsuperscript{43} Vogl also performed the title roles in \textit{Lohengrin} (1867) and \textit{Tristan und Isolde} (1869) in Munich. For further details about these productions at the Munich Hofoper, see Detta and Michael Petzet, \textit{Die Richard Wagner-Bühne König Ludwigs II} (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1970).
premiere, including an entry in Cosima’s diary, suggest that Vogl’s Loge was particularly memorable. According to Frederick Schwab of the New York Times, his portrayal was the “success of the night”:

[Vogl] …made the fire-god and the god of cunning at the same time a kind of companion-sketch to M. Faure’s Mephistopheles. Craft and plausibility lurked in every movement of this artist, and his long “speeches”—for I can scarcely refer to them by any other name—were delivered with an easy eloquence which the difficulties of the music did not seem to hamper in the least. Once and only once during the evening did the audience break out in hearty plaudits, and this at the close of one of Loge’s elaborate and wily addresses.44

After the Bayreuth Festival, Vogl undertook the major tenor roles of the Ring—Loge, Siegmund, and Siegfried—for various productions, first in Munich (Siegfried in Siegfried and Götterdämmerung, 1878); then Berlin (Loge, Siegmund, and Siegfried in the Ring cycle, 1881); and in London (Loge and Siegfried in the Ring cycle, 1882). Angelo Neumann also engaged him for his Traveling Wagner Troupe after the tenor’s success in the Berlin performances. That Vogl was able to perform each of these roles, sometimes over consecutive days, demonstrated the power of his voice as well as his enormous stamina.

In the United States, Vogl appeared in Stanton’s company for one German season only (1889–1890), but during this period, he performed most of the major Wagner tenor roles, including Tannhäuser, Tristan, Loge, Siegmund, and both Siegfrieds. His appearance at the Metropolitan Opera was highly anticipated, especially his portrayal of Loge. Critics were quick to draw attention to the tenor’s “Wagner pedigree”. As was written in the New York Times:

The performance [of Das Rheingold] was one of genuine merit, and had special importance through the first appearance here as Loge of Herr Vogl, who “created” the role at Bayreuth in 1876. The fact that this artist received his instruction in the part from Wagner in person ought to satisfy us that he knows the meaning of the text and music. […] It was a masterly interpretation, and, together with the tenor’s recent appearances as Siegfried, fully justified the large reputation he brought with him from Europe. In subtlety and incisiveness of look and action, in significance of vocal color and accentuation, it was simply remarkable. And to this must be added the fact that the tenor sang the music beautifully and enunciated the text with fine clearness. It was a genuine treat to hear Wagner’s melody, which is in the role of Loge so admirably mingled with striking declamatory passages. As Loge is without doubt the central figure of “Das

Rheingold," last night's audience was happy in having so notable a representative of him.45

As Siegfried in the Metropolitan productions of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, Vogl also did not disappoint, and reviews praised his nuanced portrayal of the hero, in combination with his excellent singing and enunciation.46

*Lilli Lehmann (1848–1929)*

Among the German singers who sang at the Metropolitan Opera, Lilli Lehmann had perhaps the most varied and illustrious career as the leading soprano of Wagnerian opera on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1880s and 1890s. Its trajectory follows that of the multiple roles she performed in the operas of the *Ring* cycle, beginning as a Rhinedaughter, a Valkyrie, and the Forest Bird in Bayreuth in 1876, to her multi-season portrayal of Brünnhilde at the Metropolitan from 1885 to 1890. Her 1914 autobiography, *Mein Weg*, which has been translated into English also, is a rare and revealing account of these experiences, including working with Wagner himself, and performing his operas in Europe and in the United States.47 Her anecdotes also provide an insider's perspective on working with other singers, conductors (notably, Anton Seidl), as well as aspects of staging Wagner opera. Furthermore, she offers her views on American cities, audiences, and critics from her unique perspective as a foreign artist.

Since her childhood, Lehmann benefitted from a close association with Wagner. He was a long-time friend of her mother, the soprano Marie Loew, with whom he had worked when he was a young opera conductor (Wagner apparently continually referred to Loew as his “first flame”). Through a combination of talent and the right connections, Lilli, as well as her younger sister Marie, already had fledgling careers singing at various German opera houses when Wagner invited them, in the summer of 1874, to participate in the first Bayreuth Festival.

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46 See *New York Times*, 8 Feb 1890, 4, and 18 Mar 1890, 5.
47 See footnote 27.
According to Lilli, he wanted some “fresh, young children” for his production of the *Ring*. In mid-August, both women with their mother arrived at Wahnfried, where Wagner played and sang for them the opening scene of *Das Rheingold*. As Lilli remembered, the moment was life-changing:

Scarcely had we heard a few measures than, charmed by the melodious sounds of the harmonies, I felt myself impelled to sing Woglinde’s part at sight. I saw the scene before me, and grasped the perfect serenity and audacity of the three maidens. I felt with delight, like a happiness I had long been craving, that I should be able to give Wagner something that he had a right to hope for, namely, pleasure in, love and understanding for his great work.

At once, upon hearing the first measures, I had seized the roles mentally, and I said to Wagner when we had finished the scene: “I shall sing Woglinde, my sister, Wellgunde, and Fräulein [Minna] Lammert, Flosshilde; you do not need to trouble yourself any more about the three, dear Herr Wagner.”

Back in Berlin, they eagerly studied the parts of the Rhinedaughters, as well as their additional assignments as Valkyries (Lilli as Helmwige, Marie as Ortrinde, and Minna as Rossweisse); Lilli was also given the role of the Forest Bird in *Siegfried*. Being the designated leader of the trio, she ensured that they all had their parts studied and memorized before the summer rehearsals of 1875, an accomplishment that had apparently delighted Wagner. The process of learning the parts had completely absorbed her, she recalled, though it was not entirely without its challenges:

The *Rheingold* we quickly made our own. It already sounded very well, and inspired in us all a feeling of happiness, of which we soon became conscious. It was otherwise with the *Götterdämmerung*, when the parts reached my hands much later, for they were written in very small characters, were hard to make out, and I had to rack my brains over them. I can still recall how I brooded over them; always coming to the same conclusion—that they must have been wrongly copied. But then, when the printed parts made the harmonies clear, and proved that it should sound that way, it had to and did sound so. With clarity came pleasure and enjoyment of the beauties of the work, which revealed themselves more powerfully to us every day and hour, and caused us to develop slowly to the stature that we had to attain.

As preparations for the festival progressed, Lehmann and Wagner developed a remarkably close professional relationship. He evidently respected the soprano, and often confided in her about artistic issues, especially regarding singers and their abilities (at the time,

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48 *My Path Through Life*, 191. According to Lilli, she had recommended the contralto Lammert to Wagner for the role of Flosshilde because she possessed a “velvety voice” and a “remarkably bright temperament.”

he was concerned with finding the best interpreters to fill various roles of the *Ring*). Lehmann, in turn, was deeply dedicated to the composer’s vision and the realization of his project. While in Bayreuth during the 1875 rehearsals, she became completely immersed in the *Ring* and thoroughly absorbed Wagner’s principles for its staging, even with roles not her own. “We were present at all the rehearsals,” she noted,

…even when we did not take part, and saw and listened and learned. Except in Munich, where *Rheingold* and *Walküre* had already been given, one had become acquainted only with fragments. There was no end to the curiosity, the astonishment, the criticisms, and none to the agitation either. Music and subject matter threw us equally into ecstasy, filled us with reverence on the one hand, and then again struck us as strange and incomprehensible, until at last the whole web became clear. One understood at once if Wagner played a scene first, and what many of the singers could not grasp, sing, nor act they learned to seize quickly and rightly through Wagner’s personal corrections.

By the time of the Festival performances, Lehmann must have demonstrated a competent knowledge of the *Ring*’s scores, to the extent that Wagner entrusted her to serve as an on-stage prompter for Albert Niemann, who played Siegmund, during Act I of *Die Walküre* (she was carefully hidden behind the fireplace of Hunding’s hut.) For her own parts, she was conscientious about the accurate singing of the text. She pointed out, for example, a common error within one of Woglinde’s most important lines near the end of the first scene of *Rheingold*:

I cannot forbear to mention again that I always sang in the *Rheingold* after my part, “Nur wer der Minne Macht/entsagt,” and never “versagt,” as I always had to hear it rendered subsequently. I called Conductor [Hermann] Levi’s attention, also, to this, when he, in 1884 at Munich, desired me to sing “versagt” instead of “entsagt”. Wagner, before whom I sang it hundreds of times, would certainly have corrected me if he had desired it otherwise. The composition, also, witnesses against it, for it does not read, “Nur wer der Minne/Macht versagt,” but, “Nur wer der Minne Macht/entsagt.” The pause of an eighth comes before “entsagt” and not before “Macht,” as it otherwise should be.

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50 See, for example, the thirteen letters that she received from Wagner during 1875 and 1876, published in their entirety in *My Path Through Life*, 198–207.
53 Op. cit., 228–29. In this part of the opera, Woglinde reveals that only the one who renounces love is able to take the gold and forge a ring from it. Remarkably, the error persists today. The verb “versagen” (which translates in this context as “to deny”) is printed in the *Ring*’s text edited by Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, *Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), whereas the verb “entsagen” (to renounce or abdicate) is the one printed in Wagner’s score. It can be argued that the latter has the more accurate meaning.
Among Lehmann’s more amusing anecdotes in her autobiography was when she, her sister, and Lammert tried out the swimming machines of the Rhinedaughters for the first time in 1876. The passage does not require reprinting here, being often cited in scholarship, but it is worth noting some of the physical risks Wagner’s singers had to endure in order to achieve the illusion he desired. In their case, each of them was strapped to a cart which suspended their bodies in cradles high above the stage. While the carts were being maneuvered to simulate the Rhinedaughters’ underwater movement (Lehmann’s machine, as we know, was directed by Anton Seidl), the singers had to appear to be swimming flirtatiously despite being strapped awkwardly in their carriages. Of the whole experience, Lehmann reported that although there was some element of fear, she and the others were eager to create the proper effect:

I had thought out all manner of saucy movements that looked well from the machine, and felt myself at ease to do all that I proposed to do with my body, and could direct pretty postures with my sisters, Wellgunde and Flosshilde. We were so confident that we really believed ourselves to be in our element.\(^\text{54}\)

Lilli’s performances in the *Ring* cycle’s 1876 premiere were hugely admired and praised by Wagner. Afterwards, her burgeoning career took her to other European cities, including Stockholm and London.\(^\text{55}\) She also began to take on the larger female roles in the *Ring* operas. In April 1884, she was Fricka in a production of *Die Walküre* at the Berlin Imperial Opera House. It was a role she sought to portray with dramatic dignity: “Through study, I had brought out with great earnestness what distinguishes Fricka; [I] had created her not as a vindictive woman but one who was fighting strongly for honor and right, and I rejoiced that I could properly treat this artistically difficult if not grateful task.”\(^\text{56}\) Around the same time, she was being wooed to sing in the United States. Leopold Damrosch first invited her to New York for some large Wagner concerts but at the time, she was unable to obtain a release from her contract in Berlin (Amalie Materna was hired instead). However, he was able secure her for the Metropolitan Opera’s

\(^{55}\) Wagner later invited her to sing the part of the first Flowermaiden for the premiere of *Parsifal* in 1882. However, she withdrew from the engagement suddenly when she learned Wagner had given the management of the staging to Fritz Brandt, with whom she had a failed romantic relationship.  
\(^{56}\) *My Path Through Life*, 316.
1885–1886 season, and despite his untimely death, the contract was honored; she arrived in New York in November 1885.

Lehmann’s move to New York was significant for personal as well as professional reasons. Initially, she was granted only a short leave of absence from Berlin to take up her engagement at the Metropolitan Opera. However, the success of her first performances in the U.S. (notably, as the title character in Carmen, and Brünnhilde in Die Walküre) garnered the support of many influential German-Americans, like the Steinway family and Oswald Ottendorfer of the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, who urged her to remain in America. Lehmann arranged to apply for an extension to her leave but it was refused, which led to her breaking her contract with the Berlin Imperial Opera House.\(^57\) While the situation with Berlin was not ideal, she admitted in her autobiography that the end result was positive, since it allowed her to continue singing in the U.S. and perform the roles she desired. Furthermore, the Metropolitan Opera offered her a higher salary for her performances.

Obviously, Lehmann’s decision to break with her Berlin contract was advantageous for the Metropolitan Opera House also; Edmund Stanton was able to secure her as one of the company’s star female sopranos for every German season until 1890. Her powerful and flexible voice enabled her to sing an enormous amount of repertory and she was cast accordingly. By this time, she had graduated from Rhinedaughter to the role of Brünnhilde in the Ring operas, which she sang in performances of Die Walküre, and in Siegfried and Götterdämmerung, including their American premieres in 1887 and 1888 (the Valkyrie’s parts in the latter two operas were then new to her). For the 1888–1889 season, Lehmann was replaced by Fanny Olden-Moran during the regular performances in New York, but she sang Brünnhilde for the American tour of the Ring in the spring of 1889. Unfortunately, her autobiography lacks any significant personal reflection about her performances in this role at the Metropolitan Opera.

\(^{57}\) According to Lehmann, she attempted to negotiate with the Intendant at the Berlin Imperial Opera House, asking him to release her from her contract there, and then upon her return to Berlin, she would pay the usual fine of 13,500 marks. She was therefore surprised when her request was refused. See op. cit., 346–48.
However, contemporary accounts consistently praised her acting and singing abilities; see, for example, the following comments from reviews which appeared in the *New York Times*:

Fräulein Lehmann interpreted the music allotted to Brünnhilde with eloquence and charm; her scene with Wotan was characterized by genuine pathos, and her acting throughout the opera was full of expression and dignity, and unmarred by a trace of affectation. (*Die Walküre*, 30 November 1885.)

Fraulein Lehmann’s Brünnhilde is scarcely as tender or as impassioned a personage as could be wished, but the lady makes up in tonal brilliancy and vigor and in physical comeliness what she lacks in depth and warmth of sentiment. (*Die Walküre*, 10 November 1886.)

Lilli Lehmann has in this opera once more demonstrated her fitness to represent the heroines of Wagnerian opera. Her singing of the final duet with Herr Alvary will be memorable as one of the finest achievements of the musical season. (*Siegfried*, 11 November 1887.)

It must be stated briefly that the evening was one of veritable triumph for Fraulein Lehmann, whose superb acting and singing as Brünnhilde has never been surpassed on the operatic stage in this country. (*Götterdämmerung*, 25 January 1888.)

Beyond the acclaim Lehmann received for her portrayal of Brünnhilde, the general success of the stagings of the *Ring* at the Metropolitan may also be partly attributed to her broad knowledge and astute judgment about the abilities of various German singers. Just as Wagner had consulted her about certain singers for the Bayreuth presentations of the cycle, she likewise became active in persuading the Metropolitan’s management to hire the best talent for the American performances, even for minor roles, in order to guarantee model performances. Lehmann’s career reached its peak during the German seasons at the Metropolitan, after which she returned to Europe, and resumed performing in opera houses there. A few years later, Cosima Wagner cast her as Brünnhilde in the *Ring* for the 1896 Bayreuth Festival, the second production of the complete cycle at the *Festspielhaus* since its 1876 premiere.

Lehmann returned to the Metropolitan in 1898 but in the presentations of the *Ring* operas of that season, she sang only occasionally: as Fricka in *Das Rheingold*, Sieglinde and Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*, and Brünnhilde in *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. At this time, she

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58 See 1 Dec 1885, 5; 11 Nov 1886, 5; 12 Nov 1887, 4; and 26 Jan 1888, 5.
also established a successful teaching career, and several of her students were subsequently engaged at the Metropolitan Opera. Among them was the Swedish-American mezzo-soprano, Olive Fremstad, who took up the roles in the *Ring* Lehmann previously sang—notably, Fricka, Sieglinde, and Brünnhilde—during the period the Metropolitan’s company was managed by Heinrich Conried, from 1903 to 1908. In 1902, Lehmann published an influential pedagogical text for singers, entitled *Meine Gesangskunst*. Although she provides minimal direct advice about singing Wagner’s operas in this book, she does point to the composer’s influence in her comprehensive approach to learning and performing a role or work. On how to sing expressively, she wrote:

> When we wish to study a role or a song, we have first to master the intellectual content of the work. Not till we have made ourselves a clear picture of the whole should we proceed to elaborate on the details, through which, however, the impression of the whole should never be allowed to suffer. […] A word is an idea; and not only the idea, but how that idea in color and connection is related to the whole, must be expressed. Therein is the fearsome magic that Wagner has exercised upon me and upon all others, that draws us to him and lets none escape its spell. That is why the elaboration of Wagner’s creations seems so much more worthwhile to the artist.

Some idea of Lehmann’s talent and excellent vocal abilities can be heard today on several early-twentieth-century recordings of her singing various art songs and operatic excerpts. Of music from the *Ring* operas, it appears only one excerpt was recorded (or is still extant): that of Sieglinde’s “Du bist der Lenz” from Act I, Scene 3 of Die Walküre. However, this was a part she rarely performed at the Metropolitan Opera; unfortunately, none of these recordings include any of Brünnhilde’s music, the role from the cycle for which she was best known.

**Other Notable Singers**

Aside from the veterans of the 1876 Festival performances of the *Ring*, the

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59 Berlin: Verlag der Zukunft. An English translation of the text by Richard Aldrich was also published the same year, entitled *How to Sing* (New York: The Macmillan Company). A third revised edition translated by Clara Willenbücher was published in 1924 with supplemental materials, and has since been reprinted by Dover Publications (New York, 1993).

60 From “Concerning Expression” in *How to Sing*, 132.

61 See the recently released CD 10 of 100 Jahre Bayreuth auf Schallplatte: die frühen Festspielsänger, 1876–1906 (Germany: Gebhardt, 2004).
Metropolitan Opera presentations of the cycle’s operas also featured several noteworthy singers who had performed in European productions outside of Bayreuth. The Austrian soprano, Auguste Seidl-Kraus (1853–1939), had sung the parts of Wellgunde and the Woodbird in the 1879 Vienna premiere of the cycle, as well as in 1881 in Leipzig, where she had met her husband, the conductor Anton Seidl. A year later, she joined Angelo Neumann’s Traveling Wagner Theatre (and Seidl) on the European tour of the Ring. The German tenor, Anton Schott (1846–1913), was also engaged by Neumann for the second half of the tour, taking over the roles that Heinrich Vogl had sang during the first half. Both Seidl-Kraus and Schott were part of Damrosch’s company for the first German season at the Metropolitan Opera, and they performed in the house premiere of Die Walküre with Seidl-Kraus as Sieglinde and Schott as Siegmund. Seidl-Kraus went on to portray Sieglinde for three more seasons (1885–1888), and also the Forest Bird and Gutrune for one (1887–1888). Her Sieglinde was commended in the press as a highly dramatic interpretation, refined and forceful, whereas her performances as the Forest Bird and Gutrune were found to be agreeable, but not exceptional. Schott’s particularly lyrical performance of Siegmund's part was deemed refreshing by many critics; as one had commented in January 1885:

Herr Schott’s Sigmund [sic] was an agreeable surprise. A representation combining the dignity and picturesqueness of look and bearing and frequent declamatory outbursts of unquestionable force had been looked for, but the delightful cantabile delivery of the love song and a hundred dainty touches of tenderness in his scenes with Sieglinde, came upon the spectator with agreeable freshness.  

For the Metropolitan’s 1890–1891 season, Stanton hired the Dresden-based German tenor, Heinrich Gudehus (1845–1909), whom he cast in all the major Wagner roles, including Siegmund and both Siegfrieds. Prior to singing in the United States, Gudehus did not appear in any of the major German performances of the Ring during the late 1870s and early 1880s. However, he had worked directly with Wagner on the role of Parsifal, which he sang in the

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62 New York Times, 31 Jan 1885, 4. Similar praise was accorded to Schott and Seidl-Kraus in the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, 2 Feb 1885, 4.
second performance of the opera during the 1882 Bayreuth Festival. Later, Gudehus undertook the major tenor parts of Tristan and Walther for the Bayreuth performances of *Tristan und Isolde* (1886) and *Die Meistersinger* (1888), respectively. Americans who made the journey would have first become acquainted with him in these roles.

As the title character in the 1890–1891 U.S. performances of *Siegfried*, the American press thought Gudehus was a mature and excellent singer but found him less convincing as the youthful hero because of his actual age (he was 45 years old at this time). Still, his experience as a specially trained singer of the Wagner method was felt by critics to be a key reason that the Stanton company’s presentations of the opera that season were regarded as artistically successful. As the *New York Times* critic recalled:

> Gudehus is not an ideal Siegfried, because he is not young, and his conception of the proper way to simulate youth is stupid. But he sings the music excellently; indeed, better than Alvary, who, aside from his vocal shortcomings, was almost perfect in the role. Gudehus has had an abundance of experience and training in this part, and it would be difficult to find a German who could sing the last half of the second act and the wonderful duet in the third as well as he does.

Further praise was given to the tenor’s performances in *Götterdämmerung*:

> Gudehus, taking his work in all its aspects, was a satisfactory Siegfried. He sings the music better than anyone who has undertaken it here, and it is a pleasure to hear the measures as Wagner intended them to be heard.

As Siegmund in *Die Walküre*, Gudehus was considered to be better than the famed Niemann, who many thought to be already past his prime when he performed at the Metropolitan two seasons before. Notably, it was felt that Gudehus sang the part “as the composer intended”; as one critic remarked:

> [He] is vocally by far the best Siegmund we have had, and his acting is thoroughly good, though not so noble as that of the wonderful old Niemann. But the latter could not sing,

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63 Wagner engaged three different tenors for the role of Parsifal in 1882 including Gudehus; the other two were Hermann Winkelmann (1849-1912), who sang at the premiere, and Ferdinand Jäger (1839-1902).

64 *New York Times*, 1 Feb 1891, 11. It is not known whether Gudehus performed the role of Siegfried prior to his American debut with Stanton’s company, although it is possible he did while living in Dresden between 1880 and 1890.

while Gudehus sang every measure finely, making the famous love song buoyant and bold…

Among the German singers who established significant careers in America, in part through their involvement with the Ring operas at the Metropolitan Opera, were the tenor Max Alvary (1856–1898) and the bass Emil Fischer (1838–1914). The latter moved to New York after terms with the Rotterdam Opera and the Dresden Opera, and became the primary interpreter in the U.S. of the roles of Wotan/The Wanderer in the first three Ring operas, as well as Hagen in Götterdämmerung. The young tenor rose to prominence in 1887 for his portrayal of the young Siegfried, which was very popular with American audiences. Breaking with tradition, Alvary performed these parts clean-shaven, instead of with a beard. He also performed as Loge in the American premiere of Das Rheingold.

A handful of participating artists in the Ring operas were of American origin. The best known of them was Sophie Traubmann (1867–1951), one of the first American-born singers to be completely trained in the United States at New York’s National School of Music. She initially appeared in the company’s 1887–1888 performances of Die Walküre as Helmwige; the following season, Traubmann reprised the role, and also performed as Woglinde in Das Rheingold and Götterdämmerung as well as the Forest Bird in Siegfried. In these same roles she appeared in the first American performances of the complete cycle, including the performances on the 1889 tour. Contemporary accounts describe her as an attractive, petite, and vivacious singer with a fresh clear voice and a competent knowledge of the music. Later in her career, Traubmann traveled to Europe for further studies—including a trip to Bayreuth for coaching by Cosima Wagner—and employment opportunities; Brünnhilde became one of her significant roles when she sang abroad. Curiously, Traubmann never again performed in American presentations of the Ring operas, although she remained a regular member of the companies at the Metropolitan Opera until 1902.

Transatlantic Impressions: German Singers and America

By most accounts, the New York critics and general public openly welcomed the arrival of these German artists to perform the Ring (and other Wagner operas) at the Metropolitan Opera. But what did Germans in Europe think of their artists being employed abroad? Moreover, how did these European singers feel about performing in the United States? It appears that several key factors attracted these German opera stars to the New World.

According to his statements published in the New York papers, Stanton discovered that during his summer business trips abroad to engage German artists, many of them were eager to sing at the Metropolitan Opera. However, iron-clad contracts that bound these singers to their respective German theatres often made it challenging for him to secure them for the American seasons. In order to come to the United States, they had to be granted permission to leave for a certain period of time, or risk breaking their contracts (as in the case of Lilli Lehmann), which often meant they would lose their pensions entirely, or faced substantial fines if they wanted to be re-employed. But despite the possible negative consequences, these German artists were especially drawn to the prospect of an American career for artistic and financial reasons. Notably, in seeking to bring to American audiences high quality performances of German opera, particularly the works of Wagner, they saw opportunities for career advancement and recognition beyond what they might achieve in their home country. Moreover, the salaries paid by major American opera companies like Stanton’s tended to be greater than those of German theatres. For Lehmann, these considerations had shaped her early-career decision to withdraw from the Berlin Imperial Opera house and work in America; as she explained,

It called for much courage, strong self-confidence, and a careful balancing of what was to be gained and lost thereby. I should not have been inclined, for the sake of the money alone, to separate myself from the abodes of art that were dear to me then, together with much else, that I still love today. I have never forgotten what I became there, but my inclination, talent, and ambition clamoured for stronger recognition, and, out of the fullness of my powers and depths of my feeling, I craved a dramatic field of labour, that I had so long desired, and which would never have been given me in Berlin, as I well knew, except in an emergency, and as an occasional opportunity. Henceforward, I could place myself, without interference, on the artistic stage that belonged to me, that had
beckoned to me so long as the goal of my efforts, and that now offered me, for the first
and perhaps for the last time, the completest opportunity.67

As it turned out, Lehmann’s choice to break with her German employer was not without
its repercussions to Stanton. After the situation became publicly known, managers of German
opera houses became even more territorial about the singers they hired, and were much less
willing to release them to perform in the United States. Some felt resentful, even suspicious,
about a major American opera house presenting German-language opera, and usurping their
artists to do so. According to Stanton, in an interview published in the New York Times, he
initially faced such attitudes when he went to Germany to engage singers for the 1886–1887
season:

When I landed in Germany…I found the German nation—if I may say so—very much
opposed to the New-York Metropolitan Opera House. All the German managers were
very severely against us. The fact that Fräulein Lilli Lehmann had broken her contract
made a great sensation all over Germany. You see, she had a life appointment at the
Imperial Opera House in Berlin, and when she came to America was granted leave of
absence. She overstay [sic] that leave to go on a concert tour, and caused much ill
feeling. The title which had been given to her was taken away. However, I have engaged
her for this season.68

Stanton later disclosed that ultimately, he did manage to persuade German theatre managers of
the merit of the Metropolitan Opera productions, and encouraged them to allow their singers
(who were already keen) to take part in them:

I saw the gentleman in charge of the Imperial Opera House at Berlin and explained to
him what the opera house was, and he became very friendly indeed. Before I left the
Teutonic shores I think I established the Metropolitan Opera House very firmly in the
good opinion of German managers. German artists know all about the Metropolitan, and
are remarkably anxious to come to America. I am quite sure that they feel that if they
make a reputation in America it will serve them in just as good stead as if they made it in
their own country.

I really believe, […] without the least prejudice, that we give German opera in
America absolutely as well as it is given in Germany.

Stanton’s response above suggests that he earnestly saw himself as a kind of emissary for
German opera in America. In negotiating for singers to come to the U.S., he was engaging in a

kind of musical diplomacy between the two countries. Perhaps in a similar vein, German impresarios saw how their houses might benefit from having artists with strong reputations on both sides of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, many singers were already taking advantage of a dual-continent career.

Stanton’s assessment that German singers were eager to come and live in America was probably honest; it certainly was true in the case of Lehmann. While singers did not typically express their thoughts in written form, Lehmann did provide some details about her life as a German artist in the United States in her autobiography. According to various anecdotes in this source, she revealed that she found much of her life in New York charming and amusing. She was gracious for the support she received from American audiences, and was particularly amazed at the level of interest and in-depth knowledge many of them showed in Wagner’s operas. In turn, she saw herself as an ambassador of the composer’s music in her adopted country:

I formed life-long friendships in America, that were founded on real congeniality and gratitude. [...] It was wonderful; they did not speak German and yet they understood me; I expressed to them my feeling in my art, and they felt with me. The highest satisfaction lifted me up to heaven, above all earthly interests, when I had attained the conviction that I had brought a work of our greatest Master near to them, which was not difficult for me to accomplish, in union with so many excellent colleagues. Their apprehension of the conception of a work, or of a character in it, was often expressed with extraordinary fineness.69

Lehmann also openly expressed her appreciation for the work of American critics, especially, in her view, their open and fair evaluation of German artists, and their endeavors to educate the public on Wagner’s operas.

A whole chapter would not be too much to devote to American criticism in recognition of all that it has done for German opera and German artists in an unselfish and unprejudiced way. [...] It was natural that the public panted for Wagner. It knew well Lohengrin, The Flying Dutchman, and Tannhäuser, Mozart and Beethoven almost better than we ourselves, but it longed for the Ring, the Meistersinger, and Tristan. Now came German opera…to give it all this, and with artists as good as only Germany could offer them.

It is not to be wondered at that there was gladness of heart on both sides. The critics were incessantly interested in conferences, which impressed many, even us artists, on the preparatory work necessary to quicken the understanding of Wagner’s text and music. In this they succeeded brilliantly and no expression of appreciation of it can be sufficient. […] If the promised gratitude of America for everything that we gave there shall endure it must be outlived by the thanks that we, the German artists, owe the country and the noble people, and it should be inscribed in golden letters in the history of the opera, of music, and of German art.  

Lehmann’s attitude to being a German singer in the New World appears to be indicative of what many other imported German artists felt, including German-born orchestral musicians who immigrated and settled in the United States during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. As Jessica Gienow-Hecht has observed, these foreign artists were drawn to come to America, not only because of the lucrative fees offered by American managers or the enthusiasm of American audiences, but for “the opportunity to carry out a mission to spread culture (especially music) from the German states around the world.” Yet, this ideal was not based on notions of political or artistic domination of German culture in America but that specifically, German music (including Wagner’s) was universally significant to merit dissemination and cultivation. Moreover, judging by their increasing interest in these German artists and Wagner’s music at this time, it was a viewpoint that many cosmopolitan Americans were then willing to embrace and support. Such was the “soft diplomacy” that characterized the cultural exchange of musicians between Germany and the U.S. during this period.

Part III: The Visual World of the American Ring: Stage Technology and Scenery

Besides featuring expert German interpreters in the key roles of the Ring operas in the Metropolitan Opera’s stagings during the German seasons, these first productions were also consciously modeled after the cycle’s presentation in 1876. As has been previously established, it was common for theatres outside of Bayreuth at this time to copy this version; not only did

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71 Gienow-Hecht, Sound Diplomacy, 77.
impresarios find it easier than coming up with a different conception (the technical challenges of staging were difficult enough already), they knew the cachet of the original attracted audiences. As Patrick Carnegy has noted, there was “box-office appeal in offering a far-flung public the already famous work ‘as given by the composer himself’ in Bayreuth.” In other words, since Wagner himself had overseen all aspects of the cycle’s entire production, its first performances in Bayreuth became regarded as a definitive realization of the work, particularly in the visual representation of the Ring’s mythical world. Angelo Neumann later demonstrated that the Ring could be performed outside of the Festspielhaus, and notably, he utilized copies of the Bayreuth scenery in these productions (not least because Wagner had insisted he do so). For the Metropolitan Opera productions of the Ring operas, their fidelity to the Bayreuth version was explicitly—even proudly—proclaimed in the house’s program booklets, as well as in newspapers advertisements and articles. In turn, American audiences expected to see nothing more than what (they believed) Wagner had envisioned.

To recreate the visual world of the 1876 Bayreuth Ring for the early American performances, Stanton, as with German singers, brought in German stage managers and stage technology to the Metropolitan Opera. With their arrival was the development of a parallel interest in the stage secrets of the Ring, which journalists sought to reveal and explain in various articles that appeared in American newspapers and cultural journals. At the time, these writers felt that their disclosure of what went on behind-the-scenes was not meant to undermine the total illusion Wagner desired his audiences to experience when they watched the operas in performance, but rather, to enhance their appreciation of it. Such reports helped to establish the Metropolitan Opera’s reputation as one of the late-nineteenth-century’s most technologically-advanced opera theatres in the United States.

73 Neumann bought and used the original Bayreuth scenery for his Traveling Wagner Theatre that toured Europe with the Ring in 1882–1883.
American Sources on the Stage Technology and Effects for Wagner’s Ring

Today, the only extant sources that describe the technical aspects of the early American performances of the Ring operas consist of several commentaries published in nineteenth-century American journals and other texts. These include: the journal Scientific American, Albert A. Hopkins’s Magic: Stage Illusions, Special Effects and Trick Photography, and Scribner’s Magazine. American newspapers very rarely featured articles exclusively devoted to the scenic effects of the Ring, possibly because the medium precluded lengthy essays and detailed illustrations. There was the rare exception though, such as the article that appeared in the New York Times which described the scenic illusions employed in the first American performances of Das Rheingold. However, where newspaper sources are valuable on this subject are the critical reviews of performances that sometimes revealed which scenic effects came off successfully, or failed, during performance.

Since these sources form the basis for the following discussion, their particular nature merits a brief examination. Notably, these documents were not private materials beyond the access of the general public, but were explicitly written and published for consumption by late-nineteenth-century Americans. They reflect Americans’ growing interest in theatre technology at the time, in which the special effects of the Ring cycle were an important part. Furthermore, these articles demonstrate how the American reception of the early U.S. performances of the Ring operas encompassed their fascination with the technical features of the works’ presentation, in addition to the music and the drama.

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From its first publication in 1845, the weekly periodical Scientific American quickly emerged as an authoritative publication on scientific and mechanical developments, with the purpose of educating Americans about them. Coverage about the technology used in opera and

74 The production records of Stanton’s company were likely lost or were consumed in the fire that destroyed much of the Metropolitan Opera House in 1892.
theatre was sparse in its early editions, but it was slowly incorporated in later volumes through the influence of Alfred Beach (1826–1896). Beach, who shared ownership and managed the journal with Orson Desaix Munn I (1824–1907), had a special liking for music and opera and sought to expand the journal’s scope to include discussion of technical innovations in all fields. It was opera’s large scale production and its established tradition that made it a viable subject for *Scientific American*; as Douglas Hubbell observed in his study of the journal:

> [O]pera became for the paper a chief focal point, since it suited a variety of purposes. For the *Scientific American*, opera represents a logical blend of music and theatre coverage; opera generally dealt with a production scale of great size, which made it further acceptable; the ingenuity called for in staging was extensive; and, to the emerging *parvenus* of the 1890’s in America, opera was “respectable” having a long tradition to support it.\(^77\)

In the 1880s and 1890s, one of the editors of *Scientific American*, Albert A. Hopkins, became its main specialist on opera and theatre technology, and hence was responsible for upholding and developing those interests of Beach. Some of Hopkins’s feats of original journalism were essays that featured the stage technology at the Metropolitan Opera, particularly the technical arrangements for the operas of the *Ring* cycle. In one such article from a December 1888 issue, he described the various “electrical aids” used in the operas, including several in *Siegfried*, such as the splitting of the anvil at the end of Act I, the breaking of Wotan’s spear in Act III, Scene 2, and the various cloud and lightning effects, as well as the illuminated sword hilt in Act I of *Die Walküre*, and the rainbow bridge in *Das Rheingold*.\(^78\) Accompanying the article are technical illustrations of the machines or props, depicted using a blend of fully-rendered drawings and “cut-away” views—usually steel-plate engravings or sometimes photographs— which were a distinctive characteristic of the journal.\(^79\) In a later issue from May

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\(^76\) On the nineteenth-century history of the journal, see Michael Borut’s study, “The *Scientific American* in Nineteenth-Century America,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1977).

\(^77\) Douglas K. Hubbell, “The *Scientific American* and its Supplement as Sources of Information about Theatre Technology,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1978); 192.


\(^79\) According to Hubbell, the *Scientific American* had increased their use of illustrations in the 1880s, since they were especially effective at conveying technical information to the general American public; see “The *Scientific American* and its Supplement as Sources of Information,” 171.
1897, Hopkins explained the inner workings of the Metropolitan’s stage (rebuilt after the fire of 1892), in consultation with its stage manager (William Parry), stage machinist (C.D. McGiehan), property master (Edward Siedle), and electrician (James Stewart). He also clarified in further detail the operation of Siegfried’s forge and Wotan’s spear, along with the mechanical activation of Fafner. This material, along with other information about general stage effects used in opera production, was compiled into a volume edited by Hopkins, entitled *Magic: Stage Illusions, Special Effects and Trick Photography*, and published by the magazine’s in-house firm, Munn and Co., in 1898. This book soon became a classic text of the late nineteenth century, and had such enduring appeal that Dover Publications reprinted it in 1976. The stage effects of the *Ring* operas are discussed in “Book III: Science in the Theater”, in Chapters 1 (“Behind the Scenes of an Opera House”; pp. 251–67), 3 (“Stage Effects”; pp. 293–310), and 4 (“Theater Secrets”; pp. 311–44).

The other main source on the stage technology used in the early American presentations of the *Ring* operas was *Scribner’s Magazine*, then a relatively new literary journal that began circulation in 1887. It soon reached a status equal to its established rivals, *Harper’s New Monthly* and *Century Illustrated Monthly*, for its exceptional coverage of musical topics. Articles about Wagner’s music featured prominently in its early editions, thus encouraging and capitalizing on American interest in his operas, then the dominant repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera. Like *Scientific American*, the popularity of *Scribner’s* was due in part to the many detailed illustrations that accompanied the essays. Two articles in particular were especially informative for readers interested in the *Ring*: William F. Apthorp’s “Wagner and Scenic Art”, published in the November 1887 edition, and Gustav Kobbé’s “Behind the Scenes of an Opera-

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80 “Behind the Scenes at the Grand Opera”, *Scientific American* 76, no. 22 (29 May 1897): 337, 346–47.
81 The musical content published in these three major literary monthly magazines, as well as the *Atlantic Monthly*, form the basis of Joseph A. Mussulman’s examination of late-nineteenth-century American culture, entitled *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870–1900* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971).
The influential Bostonian critic William Apthorp had a strikingly intellectual and meticulous approach to discussing Wagner’s theories and operas. In “Wagner and Scenic Art”, he thoroughly explains to the reader Wagner’s theories for the ideal musico-dramatic performance, impressing on them that the main goal of the composer, “stage architect” (i.e. the choreographer of stage movement), scene painter, costumer, stage manager, conductor, and the “singing actors” is to create “the most exact, perfect, and life-like expression and embodiment of the poet’s thought” as set out in the text of the drama. Apthorp’s goal was to educate Americans on Wagner’s ideas about the “total art” of staging his operas, correcting any misunderstanding that might have been caused by earlier productions being “so incompletely carried out”, such as the 1877 production of Die Walküre. In a methodical manner, he discusses how the sets, the placement and movement of singers on stage, and the gestures of the individual actors, must be naturalistic, “realistic and poetically significant,” and most of all, produce an accurate illusion of reality. Apthorp goes on to inform that in a good performance of Wagner opera, the text must be delivered with excellent musical phrasing and good enunciation; the orchestra as well must never cover the voices and in turn, the singers must never shout. To further impress upon his readers Wagner’s mythic vision, his article is accompanied by reprints of Joseph Hoffmann’s original sketches for the scenery of the 1876 Bayreuth cycle. Even today, Apthorp’s essay seems fresh, informative, and apt; at the time, it probably did help readers to better assess the quality of the first American presentations they saw at the Metropolitan Opera House. In this sense, Apthorp’s article is a good companion piece to Kobbé’s later essay, which revealed how some of these aspects were actually achieved in the American performances of the Ring.

82 Vol. 2, no. 5: 515–31, and Vol. 4, no. 4: 435–54, respectively.
Like Hopkins for *Scientific American*, Gustav Kobbé (1857–1918) also investigated and wrote for *Scribner’s Magazine* about the behind-the-scenes operations at the Metropolitan Opera, including many of the effects produced for the *Ring* operas. While corroborating Hopkins’s observations, Kobbé, being a music critic as well, offered an expanded perspective on the technical issues of staging opera.\(^8\) As evident in his discussion, Kobbé clearly understood and supported Wagner’s idea that stage effects must be an integral part of the music-drama. He even saw that Wagner’s comprehensive approach to theatrical production at Bayreuth not just affected the Metropolitan’s stagings of the *Ring* and the composer’s other works, but penetrated their methods of producing non-Wagner operas as well. Besides *Scribner’s*, Kobbé’s article appeared in three installments in the Metropolitan Opera’s program booklets during the 1888–1889 season, presumably in anticipation of the American premiere of the entire *Ring* cycle in March and April 1889.

**The Auditorium and Stage of the Metropolitan Opera House**

The auditorium and stage at the Metropolitan Opera House, as we know from various accounts, was built to impress. At the time it was constructed, it was among the largest venues for opera in the world. Its design was created by the American-born architect, Josiah Cleveland Cady, who won the contract through a competition set up by the Metropolitan’s board of directors. Cady had no prior experience building opera theatres, and it is believed that his proposal had been successful because he had the aid of Louis de Coppet Bergh. Bergh had studied architecture in Stuttgart but later moved to New York and became employed at Cady’s firm as a draughtsman and engineer. While he was working with Cady on the design for the

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\(^8\) Kobbé made his career as a music critic for several New York papers during the late nineteenth century, including the *Sun*, the *World*, the *Mail and Express*, and from 1900 until his death, the *Herald*. He also contributed music articles to various American cultural journals, such as *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, *Scribner’s Magazine*, and the *North American Review*, among others. A prolific writer, Kobbé had a deep interest in Wagner’s music and published a two-volume study entitled *Wagner’s Life and Works* (1890 and 1896). He is best known for his *Complete Opera Book* (1919), a reference work containing the plots and analyses of opera. For a full bibliography of his output, see “Kobbé, Gustav” by Paula Morgan for *Grove Music Online*. 

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Metropolitan Opera, Bergh's sister Lillie d'Angelo, a singer abroad in Europe, sent him many suggestions and pictures of various opera houses—including La Scala, Covent Garden, and several German court theatres—for inspiration and ideas for possible application to the plans for the new building.\textsuperscript{86} As a result of this influence, the Metropolitan's auditorium came to consist of the layered horse-shoe design of these theatres, but with a capacity that was significantly larger than most European houses.\textsuperscript{87} The length from the proscenium to the back of the center box was 104 feet long. The seating was distributed over the floor level, and five tiers rising more than 80 feet high.\textsuperscript{88} In total, the theatre could accommodate 3,045 people; the \textit{parquet}, or floor level, contained 600 chairs, the balcony, 735, and the gallery (named the “family circle”), 978. The primary focus of the design, however, was the 732 seats distributed into three tiers of boxes (on the parterre, first and second tiers) with twelve additional boxes located on the \textit{parquet} level (see Figure 5.1). At the beginning of the 1884 season, the boxes on the second tier were modified to create the “dress circle.” About the initial reveal of the auditorium in July 1883, some New York critics expressed awe over the features of the boxes, while others were disappointed that they were so prominent in the auditorium's construction, since to them, this put an overemphasis on social display over operatic art.\textsuperscript{89} It is somewhat surprising that Cady did not consider Wagner's Bayreuth theatre—the layout of which was known by then to many Americans—as a model for the Metropolitan's auditorium. However, the \textit{Festspielhaus}'s smaller, more “democratic,” box-less design was probably contrary to the wishes of the stockholders, who wanted the interior of their house to make a pointed statement to the social elites at the Academy of Music.

\textsuperscript{86} Both Irving Kolodin and Paul Eisler in their respective histories of the Metropolitan Opera have discussed in detail the building of the theatre.
\textsuperscript{87} New York Times, 22 July 1883, 9.
\textsuperscript{88} Martin Mayer, \textit{The Met: One Hundred Years of Grand Opera} (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), 40.
\textsuperscript{89} For example, the writer for the \textit{New York Times} noted the “commodiousness” of the boxes as well as other luxuries for their owners (see article for 22 July 1883, 9). By comparison, Henry T. Finck stated in the \textit{New York Evening Post} (23 October 1883) that, “From an artistic and musical point of view, the large number of boxes in the Metropolitan is a decided mistake. But as the house was avowedly built for social purposes rather than artistic, it is useless to complain about this…”
In addition to its large auditorium, the Metropolitan Opera had an immense stage, which, according to the plans, was 101 feet wide by 86 feet deep. Harper's New Monthly Magazine touted it as the third-largest operatic stage in the world at the time, after the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg and the New Opera in Paris, and thus surpassing that at the Academy of Music. A rigging loft, at least 90 feet and up to 160 feet above, enabled scenic drops to be raised and stored without being rolled up, and a 30-foot pit underneath the stage offered additional storage space for scenery and props. The stage itself consisted of moveable sections that could be raised or lowered by altering the length of their supporting iron bars. It also accommodated several moveable bridges (including one for painting scenery at the very back of

Diagram originally printed in Harper's New Monthly Magazine 67, no. 402 (Nov 1883), 879.
See Vol. 67, no. 402 (Nov 1883), 882. The stage at the Academy of Music was 83 feet wide (48 feet for the proscenium opening with 35 additional feet in the wings) and 70 feet deep. At the time it was built in 1854, the Academy had one of the largest stages in the world. Although now the Metropolitan had the bigger stage, the Academy still had the larger auditorium at 4,600 seats.
the stage), various traps for raising scenery and persons from below the stage, as well as many
steam, gas and electric light plots in the wings on both sides (see Figure 5.2). While by today’s
standards, the backstage area and stage machinery at this Metropolitan Opera House would be
considered insufficient for the production of operas as technically demanding as the Ring, at the
time, it was considered to be one of the most technologically advanced stages in the United
States, if not the world.

For most of the German seasons, the orchestra played on the same level as the
parquet, not down in a pit. In fact, the deployment of a sunken orchestra pit was decried early
on by some American critics, who feared the orchestra would not be heard throughout the large
auditorium (it should be noted that the Metropolitan’s orchestra was about a half to two-thirds
the size of the orchestra that performed at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival). As one journalist wrote
in the New York Times, what worked at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus was not necessarily

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appropriate for the acoustics at the Metropolitan:

We have no faith in the Wagnerian plan of sinking the orchestra. The conditions under which the experiment was made in Germany were exceptional, and they do not exist here. The performances of a band of ordinary numerical dimensions, whose work would prove immensely effective, when discoursing music from its wonted habitat, must lose much of their power and brilliancy when the harmonies rise from a sort of sub-cellar before diffusing themselves about the auditorium.⁹³

Eventually, beginning with the 1889-1890 season, the orchestral pit was lowered; although the reasons for this change are not exactly known, perhaps it was felt that the arrangement of a submerged orchestra would be acoustically beneficial after all. The adjustment appeared to have worked effectively for the Metropolitan’s opening season performance of Die fliegende Holländer. According to the report from the Times, the result was “a softening and closer knitting of the sounds of the instruments” along with the added benefit of not seeing the “jiggling violin bows” and “bobbing heads” of the musicians.⁹⁴

The Technology of Illusion in the First American Productions of the Ring Operas

In 1885, to direct the staging of Die Walküre, Stanton brought to the Metropolitan Opera Wilhelm Hock from the Hamburg Grand Opera.⁹⁵ In Walter Damrosch’s opinion, Hock was “one of the best in Germany” and “his management of the movements of great crowds on the stage…was a revelation to our public.”⁹⁶ For the 1885–1886 season, Herr Van Hell of Berlin’s Victoria Theatre took over as the Metropolitan’s stage manager, with the assistance of Theodore Habelmann, who came to New York from the City Theatre in Bremen. Habelmann subsequently assumed the position of stage manager for the rest of the German seasons, during which he coordinated the performances of all the Ring operas, including the complete cycle in 1889.

⁹⁵ The Grand Opera in Hamburg, where Hock was employed, was managed by the Intendant Bernhard Pohl (known as Pollini), Under Pohl’s management, the theatre had become a major German centre for the performance of Wagner’s operas in the late nineteenth century.
Much the operas’ scenery was prepared in Europe then imported to New York. For *Die Walküre* in 1885, the backdrops and flats were painted by the scenic artists Schaffer and Maeder. Those for *Das Rheingold* and the first two acts of *Siegfried* were created by Johann Kautsky, who sent them to New York from his studio in Vienna. The origins of the settings for Act III of *Siegfried* and for *Götterdämmerung* cannot be determined but it is possible the company reused those from parts of the other operas. The costumes for the entire cycle were copies of Carl Döpler’s original designs, and were prepared by the prominent New York costumier Henry Dazian (for *Die Walküre* in 1885 and for *Das Rheingold* in 1889), and Carl Schaffell from Berlin’s Walhalla Theatre (for *Die Walküre* in 1886, *Siegfried* in 1887, and *Götterdämmerung* in 1888). The props for all operas, however, were made in-house under the guidance of the property master, A.J. Bradwell; he was also responsible for the armor except for *Die Walküre* in 1885, when the Metropolitan employed F. Görsch from Berlin, who had apparently “supplied the composer for the first performance at Bayreuth.” A team of Americans were in charge of implementing the special effects, including James Stewart, Jr., the gas engineer and the electrician; A. S. McKay, for the steam; and A.D. Peck, for the various mechanical effects.  

As Wagner’s *Ring* cycle contained some of the most challenging and complex stage effects to produce in opera at the time, it is not surprising Hopkins and Kobbé thought it would interest their readers how these effects were achieved in the early American performances of the operas at the Metropolitan. In his article for *Scribner’s Magazine*, Kobbé eagerly upheld the theatre as the first in the United States to incorporate the latest technology that could properly facilitate the performances of Wagner’s works; in fact, he boasted that Americans had since improved on the mechanisms used in Germany for staging the composer’s operas:  

[1] In the special mechanical contrivances needed for the production of Wagner’s works, now so prominently before the public, Yankee ingenuity has grafted many improvements

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97 For the performances of *Die Walküre* in early 1885, however, the German A. Dornbach was responsible for operating the machinery.
on German designs, so that our opera-house, though young in years, has in stage-craft a longer head than the old-established German opera houses.98

While it is difficult to confirm Kobbé’s assessment, it could be said that Americans were at least led to believe that they had an opera house that was capable of producing Wagner’s Ring to a standard as never seen before. The extent to which the technical arrangements at the Metropolitan Opera were able to recreate the visual world of the cycle’s operas from the 1876 Bayreuth performances are now examined in detail.

*Das Rheingold*

Of the Ring operas, Stanton decided to produce *Das Rheingold* last at the Metropolitan Opera. The reason was likely financial; mounting a convincing production, it seemed, was a costly undertaking. As one writer of the *New York Times* shrewdly remarked:

Richard Wagner’s “Rheingold” has so many scenic difficulties that no manager or impresario has had the courage to risk the necessary thousands of dollars upon an adequate production, for without following in the most minute details the German master’s stage instructions musicians say there can be no such thing as an adequate production.99

Fortunately for Stanton, following the successfully received stagings of *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* during the 1885 to 1888 seasons, he had the full support of the Metropolitan’s board of directors to add the “Prologue” to the trilogy. It was probably his company’s most expensive and complex opera productions in terms of scenic design and technology.

Several of the scenic effects for *Das Rheingold* are discussed in some detail in an article entitled “Some Scenic Illusions: Products of Stage Art in *Das Rheingold*” that appeared in the *New York Times*.100 This was a rare type of newspaper report, when a critic was allowed the opportunity to preview a production before its official American premiere (the piece was published on December 2, 1888 and the opera’s premiere occurred on January 4, 1889.) It was

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100 Ibid.
also unusual for a newspaper reporter to write in detail about the scenic effects of an opera, so presumably, he was motivated by significant public (and perhaps, personal) interest in the production to discuss them. In turn, the article probably helped to increase anticipation for the performances, on the claim that the Metropolitan Opera was the first theatre in the United States to have the financial and artistic resources to bring to the stage one of Wagner’s most technically demanding operas.

The journalist first describes the opening scene: a “great mountain gorge”, comprised of various stage flats depicting rocks, covered by waters of the Rhine, depicted by gauze screens which rose to two-thirds of the height from the stage to the top of the proscenium.¹ The shimmering effects of moonlight and sunlight on the river are created by electric light effects with colored slides, similar to the ones used in the forest scenes in Siegfried. As he explains,

Five electric lights will be placed on either side of the stage, and their light will pour through glass slides of green and white. The green slide will be rotated on the surface of the white, so that the white light shall come unobstructed only through the angular portions of the white slides that are left unobscured. Thus the white radiance will fall upon the gauze surface of the Rhine in pointed reflections, constantly changing and producing an illusion which is well-nigh perfect. The sunlight is shown in the same way, save that yellow slides are used instead of the white ones.

When the Rhinedaughters enter the stage, they “swim” using machines similar to those designed in Bayreuth, although the writer’s description of the Metropolitan’s contraptions suggests they were simplified so only one person (instead of three) was necessary to manipulate them:

Three movable platforms have been built, corresponding in number to the maidens. From the centre of each arises a strong iron support on which there are two rests, one for the knees and the other for the chest of the singer. Lying in this manner the performers have free use of their arms and can wave them as though in actual water. Their long green floating draperies cover the platform, completely hiding a man who stands at the central support and who manipulates a carefully arranged weight by which

¹ The look of this stage set seems close to what it might have been for the 1876 Bayreuth performances, the sketches and stage designs of which were recently discovered in the archives at the Richard-Wagner-Museum in Bayreuth, Germany. A DVD released by the museum in 2006, entitled Der Ring des Nibelungen: Das Bühnenbild bei den ersten Bayreuther Festspielen 1876, Das Rheingold, examines these sources and uses computer animation to create a virtual reconstruction of this set and how it might have been deployed during the opening measures of the opera.
the singers’ rests may be raised or lowered or may be given an undulating motion. [It is he] too, who furnishes the motive power of the Rhine maidens.

The fewer number of operators required for the swimming carts might have been because they ran on tracks embedded in the Metropolitan’s stage (Hopkins noted in *Magic* that some opera houses had installed them for such a purpose).

As in the Bayreuth production, electric light, steam, and gauze curtains, were used liberally in combination for various scenic effects in the Metropolitan’s production of *Das Rheingold*. The gold guarded by the Rhinedaughters was made of yellow glass, in which was embedded an electric lamp. This light was turned on by someone in the wings at the moment the gold was to glow in the sunlight, and turned off when Alberich steals it. For the transformations between the scenes, steam was released from the wings on the prompt side, and also through the sunken perforated steam pipe at the front of the stage. Simultaneously, a series of gauze curtains were raised and lowered from the flies. Steam was used also in Scene 3 to facilitate Alberich’s transformation into a serpent, which consisted of a ten-foot-long beast made of papier-maché, with eyes of electric lights. It was further outfitted with a tube in the mouth so that steam could be released to simulate its fiery breath.

The illusion of Donner’s storm was created by a complicated array of stage effects. In Scene 4, dark gauze curtains were lowered to simulate an approaching storm. After the god sings his song (*Heda! Heda! Hedo!*), his hammer strikes the rock, and lightning flashes appear to shoot out. According to Hopkins, there were several methods of creating lightning for late-nineteenth-century stage productions. One common apparatus used to produce the effect was a type of “lamp” consisting of a metal box with a funnel-like opening at the top. An alcohol lamp is placed at the bottom of the box, while above the flame, is situated a partition that has been punched with holes. A mixture of magnesium powder and potassium chlorate is poured through the funnel opening, and when the chemical hits the heated grill, vivid lightning flashes are produced. Carl Baumann has speculated that three such lamps, or “Blitz-Maschinen”, might
have been used in the Bayreuth "Festspielhaus during the August 5 rehearsal of "Götterdämmerung in 1876. At the Metropolitan Opera, however, lightning effects were created by a stereopticon (or "magic lamp") slide projector, which, among its various uses, could project an image of a lightning bolt onto the backdrop or scenery (see Figure 5.3). As Kobbé described the functioning of this apparatus in "Scribner's Magazine":

[A] circular wooden frame is used, through which, near the outside edge, a circular hole about three inches in diameter has been cut. The circular hole is placed opposite the lens of the stereopticon. Upon a glass disc which turns in the wooden frame various figures of lightning are painted, so that when the disc is turned the figures are focused through the circular hole and flashed, vastly enlarged upon the scenery. The effect is heightened by having various portions of the scenery painted on some transparent substance and flashing a light behind them, so that as the forked lightning plays over the scenery these portions seem luridly illumined by it.

The stereopticon was also used to produce the effect of moving clouds: the machine's operator would revolve multiple slides over one another, the images on which were then projected onto gauze drops. This device was very similar to the carbon-arc lamps devised by Hugo Bähr for the 1876 Bayreuth "Ring, which he used to project light through painted glass slides to create the appearance of water and clouds.

As in nature, Wagner wanted thunder to follow all lightning effects in his "Ring operas. It appears two different methods to simulate it were employed at the Metropolitan Opera. One was the shaking of a sheet of copper, which, according to Hopkins, would produce a sharp-sounding rattle. The other—and perhaps, more effective and common—approach was the deployment of a "rabbit hutch" machine, an apparatus used at the Bayreuth "Festspielhaus. This contraption consisted of a cabinet, placed against the wall of the third fly gallery, which contained six slanting shelves with doors that opened to the wall (see Figure 5.4). Each shelf held six cannon

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102 See Hopkins, Magic, 302. Carl Baumann described the operation of this lamp in "Bühnentechnik im Festspielhaus" (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1980), 250–51.
103 As Hopkins has similarly described in "Scientific American": "The lightning and the clouds are scratched and painted on small bits of glass; [the] projection being greatly magnified by lensing, with a powerful voltaic arc electric light behind the condenser throwing them with wonderful precision and naturalness."
104 For further discussion on Bähr's arc lamps and their development, see Baumann, "Bühnentechnik," 227–31.
105 See p. 301 in Magic. The journalist of the "New York Times" article wrote that he saw this technique being implemented during his behind-the-scenes visit.
balls, which are prevented from rolling when the doors are closed. Underneath the cabinet, a broad zinc-lined trough extended 18 feet outward through the flooring, and further on to two long slants towards the floor below. In the trough were uneven patches placed at various intervals on its surface.

The apparatus was worked by two men, with one of them activating the hutch, and the other waiting at a rope pull at the second fly-gallery for instructions from the stage. If, for example, two rolls of thunder were required, the stage manager would pull on a rope, thereby sending a signal to the man further backstage on the other end of the rope, who in turn would cue the man standing by the cabinet. The latter would then throw open the doors of the three lower shelves, sending eighteen cannon balls down the trough and into the floor below. When another signal is given for the second peal of thunder, the balls in the top three shelves are freed. In general, the “rabbit hutch” machine was thought to be a particularly effective device for creating thunder because it could supply a range of sonic effects; one can modify the number of cannon balls released to produce anything from a distant rumble of thunder (e.g. one or two balls) to a violently loud and short peal (e.g. all thirty-six balls at once).

As it had been in Bayreuth, the rainbow bridge to Valhalla traversed by the gods at the end of the Das Rheingold was a significant challenge for the Metropolitan Opera’s stage technicians. In New York, it was a combination of a physical structure and a light projection. This was how the journalist of the Times reported the effect was achieved:

During the preceding scene there is a screen of rocks extending from a precipice on one hand to Valhall on the other. A man is stationed behind a rock about 25 feet from the rear of the stage with a powerful stereopticon whose light is thrown through a curved prism. The reflection of this is made to correspond exactly with the curve of the rock screen, behind which is a drop that is precisely the same tint and texture as the sky drop. As soon as morning breaks the rock screen is drawn rapidly away and the rainbow appears as though it were a bridge from the earth to Valhalla. Behind the substitute for the rock screen is a succession of steps answering exactly to the curve of the rainbow, and up these the gods ascend into their home.

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106 Note that the critic erroneously interpreted the arrival and clearing of the storm as also the “fall of night” and the “break of morning”, neither of which are indicated in Wagner’s stage directions.
Both Hopkins and Kobbé have described the creation of the projected rainbow in detail. The apparatus consisted of two adjustable glass prisms on steel mounts, placed side-by-side but with one prism higher than the other. This particular arrangement produces a full color-spectrum when a light shines through them, an effect which, when set in front of a stereopticon, can be further magnified from a span of five-eighths of an inch to 60 feet (see Figure 5.5). According to Kobbé, this contrivance was specially developed by the Metropolitan Opera’s engineer, James Stewart, Jr. However, it was probably like Hugo Bähr’s machine used for the 1876 Bayreuth production, which in turn, was similar to an earlier model employed at the Paris Opera in 1860 for a staging of Giacomo Rossini’s Mosè in Egitto (Moses in Egypt). Whether the illusion was more successfully carried out in the American performances of the opera in 1889 than in the 1876 Bayreuth presentations is not known; perhaps the lack of commentary in the American reviews on this matter indicate it was, at the very least, not worse.

*Die Walküre*

Compared to Das Rheingold, *Die Walküre* seemed to be of less interest to writers from a technological standpoint. To be sure, the work did not require as many complex effects as some of the other operas of the cycle, and it might have been that the Metropolitan Opera performances used mostly the same techniques as were used in Bayreuth, or even in opera production in general. Many of the effects in *Die Walküre* consist of changes in weather (e.g. lightning and thunder), which were carried out by the same methods discussed above. But there were a couple of notable instances in which the production team for the American performances sought different solutions to certain scenic challenges from those implemented for the 1876 presentations. One of these is the “Ride of the Valkyries” at the beginning of Act III. In Bayreuth, Bähr, who had developed the carbon arc lamps and the solution for the rainbow bridge, had also pioneered the technique of projecting light through moving glass slides. This method was

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107 The engraving published in *Magic* reflects the photograph of Bähr’s projector with prisms seen on p. 230 of Baumann, *Bühnentechnik*. 
Stage Effects at the Metropolitan Opera for Das Rheingold.

Figure 5.3. Lightning Projector.\textsuperscript{108}

Figure 5.4. The “Rabbit Hutch” Thunder Machine.\textsuperscript{109}

Figure 5.5. The Rainbow Effect.

\textsuperscript{108} Images for Figures 5-3 and 5-5 from “Electrical Aids to the Drama,” 387 and 390.
\textsuperscript{109} Image from Kobbé, “Behind the Scenes,” 452.
applied to the “Ride” for the Bayreuth premiere of *Die Walküre*, in which the slides, which Carl Döpler painted with images of the Valkyries riding their horses to Valhalla, were projected onto the scenic backdrop during the music of the prelude.\(^{110}\) As we know from contemporary reviews of the performances, the images were barely visible to the audience; a similar complaint was made by critics when the Neuendorff-Fryer troupe used the same technique for their production of *Die Walküre* in New York in 1877. It was perhaps because of the ineffectiveness of this method that the company at the Metropolitan Opera (beginning with Leopold Damrosch) chose not to use it to depict the Valkyries. Rather, the production team appeared to have employed lighting effects to suggest, rather than literally represent, the riding Valkyries. One critic seemed satisfied by this decision; as he noted in a review of the January 1885 performance:

> It is hard to find one fairly satisfactory; for stuffed figures and the absurdities of magic-lantern slides are well let alone. A simple and suggestive scheme we have always thought to be the employment of the usual flash of lightning, or bluish light, off the stage, just in the direction pointed at by the assembled Walkyrs, as they rush across to look and exclaim, at the intervals designated by the text and music.\(^{111}\)

Another effect that was of particular interest to both Hopkins and Kobbé was how the glow of the sword hilt, near the beginning of the third scene in Act I, was achieved. While this seems a minor effect compared to the challenge of realizing the “Ride of the Valkyries”, in practice, it was quite difficult to accomplish convincingly. According to Wagner’s directions, during Siegmund’s contemplation of the sword, the fire in the hearth suddenly collapses, casting a glow on the spot on the tree trunk where Sieglinde had gazed upon earlier, and revealing to Siegmund the hilt of the buried sword. In the *Festspielhaus* Bähr had projected light from an arc-lamp through a red glass slide which then illuminated the sword’s handle. At the Metropolitan Opera, however, a different solution was employed: a red incandescent lamp was placed in a tin box, which was painted so it resembled a knot in the tree. The box hung on a hook just below the hilt of the sword, and at the appropriate moment, the light in the box was turned on. This

\(^{111}\) “German Opera: Production of Die Walküre,” *The Independent*, 5 Feb 1885, 9.
technique was perhaps an improvement on Bähr’s projection method, since it may have been simpler to implement and coordinate with the music, and might also have appeared more realistic, as well as visually striking, to audiences sitting in the Metropolitan’s large auditorium.

Siegfried

The special effects in Siegfried, which include some of the most complex technical arrangements employed in the Ring cycle, were of great interest to Hopkins and Kobbé, who both described them to their readers in remarkable detail. Their discussions focused on five particular aspects: various lighting effects used in Act I; the operation of Siegfried’s forge and the splitting of the anvil; the singing and activation of the dragon Fafner; the Woodbird; and the special construction of The Wanderer’s spear.

The Gas-Plot Diagram and Lighting Effects in Act I

During the German seasons at the Metropolitan Opera, it was the gas-engineer, then James Stewart, Jr., who was chiefly responsible for all lighting effects during an operatic performance. Beyond simply manipulating the foot and border lights, Stewart also operated a “gas table”, which consisted of a platform and an upright slab containing seventy-two valves that controlled every gas fixture in the house (see Figure 5.6). The table was situated near the proscenium on the prompt-side (the side of the stage on the left of the spectator). In Siegfried the first Act called for especially sophisticated lighting techniques; according to Kobbé, it required such lengthy technical rehearsals that its success in performance was deemed “all a matter of gas,” in theatre parlance. To show the complexity of coordinating the various technical arrangements to create the effects in Act I, Kobbé provided in his article a facsimile of the “gas-plot diagram” that was prepared by Stewart and his assistants (see Figure 5.7). Although such production plans on the Ring’s early American performances from this period are no longer extant, they were likely created for each act of the operas. If the above example is typical, then
Figure 5.6. The Gas Table.\textsuperscript{112}

Figure 5.7. Gas-Plot Diagram for \textit{Siegfried}, Act I.

\textsuperscript{112} Images for Figures 5-6 and 5-7 are from Kobbé, "Behind the Scenes," 451 and 453.
these diagrams usually indicated the placement of the scenery, positions of all electrical and gas pockets as well as lights, the names of the stagehands who were stationed at them, an outline of their duties, and their cues. This facsimile is thus a rare opportunity to understand how the light effects were achieved in the Metropolitan’s first production of *Siegfried*.

At the top of the diagram are instructions describing the lighting required at the beginning of the Act, which takes place in Mime’s cave: as the curtain goes up, the house lights are dimmed and the foot lights turned to “1/4” up, thereby creating a moonlit exterior. (Note that Wagner does not specify what time of day it is at the start of the scene, so the indication for “moonlight” might have meant that the stage, i.e. the interior of Mime’s cave, should be relatively dark.) The stage setting consists of a backdrop, possibly depicting the forest, with a couple of set pieces in front of it. Flats representing rocks are placed at prompt side (left of the spectator) and opposite-prompt side (or “o-p-side”, the right of the spectator) in the first, second and third wings, and are labeled R.W. 1, R.W. 2, etc. (“R.W.” meaning “rock wing”). Another set piece is positioned near R.W. 1, o-p-side. There appears to be no further instructions for lighting in the first scene since the other cues in the diagram refer to scenes 2 and 3.

For the start of the second scene, Wagner’s directions in the score indicate that The Wanderer enters Mime’s cave from the forest through a door at the back of the cave. According to the gas-plot diagram, Wotan arrives on stage via a runway bridge set up on the fourth o-p-side entrance. When he appears, one of Stewart’s assistants, “Tully”, at the fourth prompt-side entrance, shines a blue light on The Wanderer and holds it on the singer until he is off the bridge, at which point, as shown on the diagram, the light is turned off. The Wanderer continues to advance slowly to the front of the stage, as per Wagner’s instructions; he reaches the stump and sits, where he is illuminated again, this time by a white light operated by Tully from his new position at the first prompt-side entrance. This light is kept on The Wanderer until the end of the scene, when he makes his way to the back of the cave for his exit. As he ascends the runway and leaves the stage, the assistant “Walters” at the fourth prompt-side entrance shines a “flicker
light” on The Wanderer and against the backdrop. This “flickering” is produced by the rapid back-and-forth movement of two irregularly shaped panels of hammered white glass glazed with lead, held in front of an electric light. It is a key effect in Siegfried as it appears in two other significant dramatic points in the opera: 1) at the beginning of Act I, Scene 3, where it represents the glints of sunshine in the forest's foliage that terrifies Mime; and 2) the Waldweben scene in Act II, for which it provides the shimmering light in the forest.

When Siegfried returns to the cave in the third scene of Act I, he enters with a yellow-colored spotlight on him, presumably to give the illusion that he has come in from the sunlit forest at which Mime was staring just earlier. Here the cues in the diagram indicate that “Gregory” (at the fourth prompt-side entrance), and “Philips”, on the opposite side, hidden in the wing at the top of the runway, should simultaneously change the color of the light from the blue used on Wotan in the second scene, to yellow on Siegfried here. As Hopkins has described, the different colors for these electric spotlights were achieved by sliding color gelatin plates over the reflectors of the lamps (see Figure 5.8).

Siegfried’s Forge

The mechanical properties used for Siegfried’s forging of the sword at the end of Act I were a technical tour-de-force, and employed both gas and electric light effects. Both Kobbé and Hopkins described their functioning in detail, the complex coordination of which is also evident in the gas-plot diagram described above. The bellows, located in “rock wing” (R.W.) 3, prompt side, consisted of a cylinder made of “hides” supported by a square wooden frame. A lever on top of the leather cylinder enabled Siegfried to make it rise and fall. In the same wing as well was a set of red bunch lights, which was operated by Otto (see Figure 5.9). The forge was set up near the front of the stage, and consisted of a table-like frame with its front, sides, and top covered. On top of the forge was a box painted to resemble stone, which contained six incandescent electric lights set behind a piece of red gelatin, to produce the “fireglow” as
indicated in the diagram. These were wired (labeled “electric wire”) to an electric pocket located in the first R.W., prompt-side. Also installed on the top of the forge was a gas jet, which was connected to a pipe that led back to the nearest gas pocket (first R.W., prompt-side). The pipe was separated into two channels by a “T” splitter; one channel fed the gas jet; the other was joined to a sprinkler burner (on the diagram this is marked with a “+” with the note “Gas to work at cue”). A rubber tube connected the gas jet to a box containing lycopodium powder underneath the forge. Extending out of the box was another rubber tube, which was operated by a man lying underneath the table (see Figure 5.10).

According to Kobbé’s observations, an effective illusion of Siegfried fanning the fire with the bellows during his first forging song (“Nothung! Nothung!”) required the simultaneous implementation of no less than three different kinds of lighting. Not only did the fire have to flare up convincingly on cue, but its glow reflecting off the surrounding objects also had to be simulated. With the apparatus described above, the effect was achieved in the following manner: Just before the curtain rose, the gas jet was lighted, though turned down so the flame could not be seen. Each time Siegfried pulled the handle of the bellows, this was the cue for fire (as indicated in the gas-plot diagram). At this moment, Stewart, who would be sitting in second R.W. prompt-side, opened a valve, admitting gas into the split pipe. When the gas reached the split, the burning jet ignited. As Kobbé further explains:

At the same time, the man under the forge blows through the tube which leads into the box of lycopodium powder. A quantity of this volatile powder is thus blown up out of the box. Coming in contact with the jet and the flames from the split pipe, it blazes up, the ignited particles at the same time floating over the hearth and thus producing the effect of gaseous flames flickering over a bed of coal or embers and running in lambent undulations from the point at which the current from the bellows fanned the fire. The man who turns on the gas [i.e. Stewart] makes at the same time electrical connection with the box of incandescent lights, and these shining the red gelatin throw a red glare upon Siegfried.

At this point, Otto also turned on the red bunch lights, which are reflected off a mirror so that the glow of the fire ran up and down the wing (R.W. 3) behind Siegfried.

After Siegfried has melted the pieces of the sword and pours the metal into a mold, he
plunges the mold into a trough, and steam is released there as it cools. The trough on the Metropolitan’s stage is connected to steam pipes at R.W. 1, prompt-side, via a hidden hose; as the gas-plot diagram shows, A.S. Mackay was responsible for discharging the steam on cue. Following this, Siegfried removes the sword from its mold and begins to forge it on an anvil using a hammer while singing the second forging song, “Hoho! Hoho! Hohei!” (see Figure 5.11). The anvil here is outfitted with a positive plate, which is created out of a six-and-a-half-by-twelve inch piece of corrugated iron, and negative sections of iron wire, 3/16ths inches in diameter and 12 inches long, placed above the positive part and bowed upward at the center. It is fed by a current of 15 amperes through a concealed wire under the stage from the electric pocket in R.W. 2, prompt-side. To create the shower of sparks as the sword is struck with the hammer, the singer portraying Siegfried would hit the bowed negative plates so they touched the positive, corrugated one, causing a momentary short circuit each time that created the desired effect. In the final moments of the scene, Siegfried “splits” the anvil with his sword, by striking a spring that releases one half of the anvil; the bottom corner of one side of the anvil has been removed to enable its collapse, as shown in Figure 5.12. Afterwards, he holds the sword triumphantly aloft, at which point Tully throws a white spotlight on the singer as the curtain descends.

Beyond the excellent stage coordination required to carry out the scene effectively, the overall success of these effects depended as well on the cooperation of the artists who sang the role of the hero. Besides requiring strong vocal technique, the forging songs also demanded that, in a realistic interpretation, the singer perform his actions in proper sequence to the music, and in as natural a manner as possible. As Richard Fricke recalled, he and Wagner coached Georg Unger, the original Siegfried, extensively in this part until he performed it convincingly:

Siegfried’s part is inordinately long and difficult, but he [Unger] is working hard and conscientiously, hammering the word to the beat of the music, until he finally attaches the handle, and then at the end has to split the anvil. Much work, much effort, however it finally looks most true, most natural, and another cliff has been scaled.113

113 Fricke, Wagner in Rehearsal, 78.
Figure 5.8. Lamps with Colored Screens.

Figure 5.9. Bunch Lights. 114

Figure 5.10. Rear View of Siegfried’s Forge. 115

Figure 5.11. Siegfried Forging the Sword.

Figure 5.12. The Splitting Anvil. 116

114 Images for Figures 5-8 and 5-9 from Hopkins, Magic, 298.
115 Image from Kobbé, “Behind the Scenes,” 450.
116 Images for Figures 5-11 and 5-12 from “Electrical Aids to Drama,” 387.
In a similar vein, to help him practice the actions for the forging scene, the Metropolitan’s star Siegfried, Max Alvary, had requested that a forge like the one on stage be built in his room.

_The Dragon_

The dragon in Act II of _Siegfried_ was of significant interest to audiences and critics because it was (and still is) particularly challenging to stage. The model imported from England employed at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival performances had provoked much criticism from journalists. By comparison, the Metropolitan Opera’s dragon was deemed the most credible ever built, according to Kobbé, even drawing praise from German artists who declared it to be “the most practical and impressive monster they have seen.”

The American dragon was designed and manufactured in the Metropolitan’s own property workshop. Its head was made of papier-maché and it had a thirty-foot-long body, formed from a thin wire skeleton covered with curled leather scales which had been bronzed and painted. A boy was dressed as the forelegs, which consisted of a canvas suit painted the same color as the dragon’s hide with curled leather scales on the trousers below the knees, and large clawed feet for shoes (see Figure 5.13). He sat inside the body of the dragon and performed the beast’s movements, his hands manipulating levers to open and close the mouth and eyelids. The steam for the dragon’s breath was provided via an elastic pipe that ran from the bottom of the tail through to the throat. Kobbé commented that the scene was very exhausting for whoever donned the creature’s front legs because it took forty minutes long to perform. In the 1890s, the operation of the dragon was taken over by two full-grown men.

Stanton’s company at the Metropolitan Opera also made some adjustments to the placement of the artist singing the role of Fafner. In German productions the singer usually hid inside the dragon’s body, and sang the part through a speaking trumpet. At the Metropolitan, he also used a large speaking trumpet but sat under a raised bridge, directly beneath the dragon so “the voice sounds as though it is issued from the dragon’s throat” (see Figure 5.14). A
Figure 5.13. The Dragon’s Forelegs.\textsuperscript{117}

Figure 5.14. How the Dragon Sings.

\textsuperscript{117} Images for Figures 5-13 and 5-14 from Kobbé, "Behind the Scenes," 435 and 449.
stagehand accompanied the singer under the bridge, to hold a lamp for the artist so he could see his music on the stand, while the solo répétiteur gave him his cues from the wings. This arrangement, in Kobbé’s opinion, had the advantage of enabling the singer and the person creating the movements of the dragon to focus entirely on their respective tasks so the illusion is performed “in the best possible manner.”

The Woodbird

Like the dragon, the woodbird in the Metropolitan’s stagings of Siegfried employed a similar division of responsibilities between the singer and stagehands activating the prop. In this case, the woodbird was represented on stage by a mechanical bird that operated by clockwork, with the soprano singing the part in the wings. The effect of the bird leading Siegfried to Brünnhilde at the very end of Act II was a rather interesting technical feat. According to Wagner’s stage directions in the score, the bird teases Siegfried at first, leading him in various directions before heading toward the back of the stage. To achieve this illusion, three mechanical birds moving on wires were deployed. First, the bird closest to the front of the stage is set in motion, the clockwork making the wings flap. It travels across the stage diagonally to the right and towards the back, and disappears into the wings. Another bird (which would appear to the audience to be the same) takes the previous one’s place, continuing along another wire, this time moving diagonally from right to left. A third bird set even further back takes over from where the second left off, finally bringing Siegfried to the exit at the back of the stage, just as the curtain falls.

Wotan’s Spear

The Wanderer’s spear used during the Metropolitan’s German seasons was a mechanical property of interest for Hopkins, notably for the electrical mechanism that enabled it to split at the moment Siegfried strikes it near the end of the second scene of Act 3. A lamp of
30 volts is hidden in the spear, with the core wrapped with heavy brown paper for insulation. A mass of cotton is stuffed around carbon filaments at the points where the spear is to shatter apart. At the moment Siegfried delivers a blow to Wotan’s spear with his sword, a man in the wings turns on an electric switch, which causes the cotton to catch fire. The spear is thus split apart and at its splintered ends, tongues of flame fly out. Like many of the properties employed in the opera, the object itself is only one part of the total illusion; an excellent stage manager was also necessary to cue the action to the music.

_Götterdämmerung_

Concerning Stanton company’s production of _Götterdämmerung_, Hopkins and Kobbé revealed very little, unfortunately, and aspects of its staging were rarely discussed in newspaper reviews. To be sure, many of the technical methods employed for the other three operas were also used its presentation. But _Götterdämmerung_ does contain several scenes requiring complex stage effects which one might think would merit extended discussion, for instance, the conflagration of the gods at the end of the work. Only Hopkins touches on the subject of the final moments of the opera, although he is not explicit about how the illusion was achieved at the Metropolitan Opera. In _Magic_, he reported on how fire and smoke effects were produced for stage productions in the late nineteenth century, and it is likely the stage technicians at the Metropolitan employed some version of the method he described:

Conflagrations are produced in a number of ways, and if proper precautions are taken, they are perfectly safe. Usually the buildings which are to be destroyed by fire are constructed of separate pieces of stage carpentry, through which the painted canvas is attached. They are raised and lowered by means of hinges, slides, cords, and pulleys, so as to give the effect of tumbling down. The fire proper consists of chemical red fire and powdered lycopodium used separately, the former to give a red glow and the latter to represent the flames. Variously colored electric lights and small pieces of fireworks simulate the leaping of the sparks.  

Like the 1876 Bayreuth production of the _Ring_ cycle, steam was used at the Metropolitan to provide the illusion of smoke; if colored smoke was required, electric lights were shone through

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118 Hopkins, _Magic_, 305.
different colored gelatin plates into the steam. At the Festspielhaus, the steam was released through a rubber hose which was placed where the effect was desired; however, this method often resulted in an audible whistling hiss, as some critics had complained in their reviews.

Technicians at the Paris Opera House later devised a solution comprising of a series of triangular apparatuses which enabled steam to be discharged noiselessly. While it is not known whether the Metropolitan Opera adopted this kind of equipment, it did have a perforated steam pipe in a sink cut at the very front of the stage (see the part labeled “SK” for “sink” in Figure 5-2), through which steam could be released to create a “curtain.” This pipe was probably used for the scenic transitions in Das Rheingold, but may also have been employed in various parts in Götterdämmerung. Hopkins noted that it was used effectively for the transition between Siegfried’s funeral and the beginning of Act III, Scene 3, which called for various mist effects.

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Even with revealing descriptions, such as Kobbé’s, about how the stage effects of the Ring operas were produced at New York’s Metropolitan Opera, it is ultimately difficult, of course, to judge exactly the quality of the stage scenery and the visual effects that were employed by Stanton’s company in their productions of these works; further research is needed to see how they fared compared to European performances of the operas during the same period. As will be discussed in the next chapter, American reviews of the performances indicate that the visual elements did not always succeed in creating the proper illusion and, more often than not, their presentation received mixed reactions. Nevertheless, that these productions had the expertise of artists such as Anton Seidl and stage technicians experienced with the production of Wagner’s operas probably meant that they fared better than they might have without them. Furthermore, American audiences appear to have been truly engaged by them, visually as well as musically. One can get a sense of what they might have seen from this rare production photo of Siegfried’s death, taken during a rehearsal of Götterdämmerung at the Metropolitan Opera.
House in early 1890, expressly for the magazine, *The Illustrated American* (see Figure 5.15).\(^{119}\)

Although it is a still photograph in black and white, it is nevertheless remarkably moving to see the sheer amount of detail in the painted backdrops and flats depicting the forest, the individuality in the costumes of the Gibichung men, their artful arrangement on the stage as they look on after the hero’s death, and Siegfried’s crumpled body at the forefront, cradled by Gunther.

![Figure 5.15. Siegfried’s Death, photographed for The Illustrated American, 1 March 1890.](image-url)

\(^{119}\) *The Illustrated American* 1, No. 2 (1 March 1890): 33. The accompanying caption on p. 27 states: “Our large picture, the “Death of Siegfried” is from a photograph by Parkinson. This was made especially for *The Illustrated American* from a rehearsal of Wagner’s great opera ‘Götterdämmerung’.”
CHAPTER VI: The Reception of the Early American Performances of Wagner’s Ring Cycle, 1885–1891

“In New York…the press is practically unanimous in favor of German opera, and the press, as a rule, is omnipotent in the theatrical matters. I am convinced, for instance, that one of the principal reasons why Wagner was rapidly acclimated in New York…is that…all the critics are young men, who only needed to hear a few good performances of Wagner’s operas to be filled with an enthusiasm for them, with which many of their readers could not help being infected.”

--Henry T. Finck, New York, March 1888

Previous investigations into the late-nineteenth-century American reception of Wagner’s Ring cycle, particularly in the press, are usually subsumed within broader considerations of the critical responses to Wagner and his operas in the context of Gilded Age America. In his Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870–1900, Joseph Mussulman devoted one chapter to discussing the development of American interest in the composer’s music in four influential cultural magazines of the period: the Atlantic Monthly, Harper’s New Monthly, the Century Illustrated, and Scribner’s Magazine. Although the Ring cycle was not central to his examination of the articles on Wagner that appeared in these periodicals, he did reveal these magazines as important sources on the shifting American views on the composer’s theories and music. Harold Briggs, in his PhD dissertation entitled “Richard Wagner and American Music-Literary Activity from 1850 to 1920,” expanded on Mussulman’s discussion, and investigated the reception of Wagner in a range of periodicals, including music journals, such as Dwight’s and The Musical Courier. To date, however, the critical reception of the early American performances of the Ring operas during the Metropolitan Opera’s German seasons has not been examined in detail. This chapter considers the changing expectations and reactions of those writing about the cycle in the American press since the mid-nineteenth century. With the advent of the first American staged performances of all the Ring dramas at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, the German seasons there between 1884 and 1891 presented yet another cycle of assimilation for Wagner’s music in the United States. During this

period, another generation of music critics rose to prominence, a group of journalists who voiced advocacy for the composer’s music, and notably, the Ring cycle, for which they sought to shape Americans’ appreciation. While seeking to objectively evaluate performances of these operas given by Stanton’s company of the Metropolitan Opera, they were also keen to encourage American tastes for Wagner’s epic work so to demonstrate cultural progress vis-à-vis Europe. The extent to which Americans took interest in the Ring cycle is weighed in light of the data from extant box office records and general observations made by the U.S. media about the audiences that attended these presentations.

**Part I: Responses to the Ring in New York**

American audiences were first introduced to the cycle’s operas individually, and out of sequence, over a span of several seasons. At the Metropolitan Opera, Die Walküre was the first to be staged in January 1885, followed by Siegfried in November 1887, Götterdämmerung in January 1888, and finally, Das Rheingold in January 1889. The complete cycle was subsequently given in March of 1889. There were probably several reasons for this schedule, for though the Ring had been performed rather successfully outside of Bayreuth, there was still the question of whether it could be recreated in America. The Fryer-Neuendorff production of Die Walküre in 1877, now considered woefully inadequate, certainly cast some doubts. The Metropolitan’s directors would have been aware that the mounting of a credible production of the Ring cycle, as the largest and perhaps the most significant operatic work of the time necessitated substantial preparation, as well as financial and artistic resources (in addition to the other operas the company had to perform during each season). The production of the scenery for Siegfried and Rheingold, most of which was painted in Vienna and not in-house at the Metropolitan, would have required time for completion and exportation. As well, the relative number of complex stage effects in each opera probably affected the order in which the operas were performed: Die Walküre had the fewest of them and therefore, was the easiest (and
perhaps the cheapest) to stage first, whereas Das Rheingold had the most such effects, and was thus the most difficult (and expensive) to produce, so it was given last. The availability of preferred singers for the title roles might also have dictated the scheduling of the performances. It is likely the Metropolitan’s directors preferred this arrangement of introducing the cycle’s operas to the American public one by one, since the overall cost of presenting such a large work could be distributed over time to minimize financial risk and in turn, help ensure that the resulting productions could be artistically convincing.

The introduction of the Ring cycle to Americans in increments enabled the company at the Metropolitan Opera to offer multiple performances of each opera. This allowed the productions to be individually tested on stage, before the entire cycle was undertaken. This may have been a reason the company also waited until all the operas of the cycle had been performed in New York before taking them on tour; with the exception of presentations of Die Walküre in Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia in 1885, the rest of the operas were not performed in other cities until the spring tour of 1889. Furthermore, many single performances of the individual operas provided a chance for a greater number of Americans to see them, as compared to the overall numbers if only three cycles were performed at the end of one season. Die Walküre received a total of 27 single performances at the Metropolitan Opera House between 1885 and 1891; Siegfried 20 single performances between 1887 and 1891; Götterdämmerung 17 performances between 1888 and 1891; and Das Rheingold, 9 single performances, between 1889 and 1891. A total of three full cycles were given there in 1889 and 1890.²

New York Audiences

The New York audiences who attended performances of the Ring operas were reported

in contemporary reviews to be large and attentive, and demonstrated interest and enthusiasm through hearty applause. Adjectives such as “rapt attention”, “admiring”, “undivided attention”, are peppered throughout critics’ descriptions. The journalists seemed pleased that so many were genuinely interested in the performances, which were regarded as having the aura of an important historical event. Henry Krehbiel of the New York Tribune, for example, stated that he found it gratifying that the audience at the American premiere of Götterdämmerung was so responsive to the presentation, and in the intermissions between the acts, he observed many chatting excitedly about it. The full cycles themselves also generated excitement beyond New York; for those performances, the Metropolitan Opera House seemed to become a kind of U.S. “Festspielhaus” to where other Americans made a pilgrimage. For the opening night of the first American cycle on 4 March1889, the Tribune recorded that there were “many strange faces in the audience to testify the interest felt in the occurrence in communities outside New York”, the result of applications for seats to these performances “pouring in” from the cities of Philadelphia, Boston, New Haven, Harrisburg, and “even as far west as Pittsburgh.”

Because of their cachet, and to a certain extent, their novelty, it is perhaps not surprising that of all the operatic performances given by the Metropolitan’s company during the German seasons, the Ring operas drew the largest receipts. Although box office records from the German seasons are no longer extant, we can use Krehbiel’s documentation of the amounts received for the 1887–1888 season in the Tribune as a reliable measure. During this season, Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung earned the highest receipts, with Siegfried at $38,285.00, Götterdämmerung at $21,108.25, and Die Walküre at $14,948.00. To put these numbers into perspective, however, the higher revenue for Siegfried and Götterdämmerung may be attributed to their novelty, since the operas received their American premieres that season. Moreover, Siegfried received eleven performances, whereas Götterdämmerung and

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3 New York Tribune, 5 Mar 1889, 8.
Die Walküre had seven and four each, respectively. Yet the average attendance for each performance of Götterdämmerung was higher, at 2,870 persons (with average receipts at $4,233.65), versus 2,476 attendees (average receipts at $3,323.50) for Siegfried, and 2,306 (average receipts at $2,985.75) for Die Walküre.\(^5\) The receipts for Das Rheingold (which premiered in January 1889) are not known but it could be assumed they were not as high as for the other operas of the cycle, based on critics’ reports that the audiences were not as large. Critics surmised that this was because the mythical plot of Das Rheingold was felt to be less appealing to New York audiences whereas the “human element” in Götterdämmerung proved more attractive. Overall though, the reportage does indicate that the early American performances of the Ring operas were generally very successful financially, which thus strongly suggests that Americans were genuinely curious and engaged by them.\(^6\)

To put into broader context the value of the high receipts gained from the Ring opera performances, ticket prices to these presentations were the same as for any other opera performed during the regular season. For the 1887–1888 season, single-ticket admission for the “orchestra” section was the most expensive at $4.00 (the equivalent at the Academy cost $5.00), followed by the “dress circle” at $2.50; the front rows of the balcony were $1.50, and $1.00 for the other rows; in the “family circle”, the first three rows were 75 cents per seat, and 50 cents for all other rows. During the 1888–1889 season (in which the premiere of Das Rheingold and the full cycle were given), ticket prices for the “orchestra” and “dress circle” were reduced to $3.00 and $2.00, but those for the rest of the auditorium remained the same as before. Otherwise, pricier options, such as the “bagnoir” and the “first tier” boxes, which contained six seats each, could be rented for $30.00 and $60.00, respectively. The house’s stockholders were

\(^5\) In Chapters of Opera, Krehbiel recorded slightly different totals for Siegfried and Götterdämmerung, although the overall outcome is still the same: the seven performances of Götterdämmerung reportedly brought in $30,324, with average receipts per performance of $4,332 and average audience attendance at 2,871; the eleven performances of Siegfried brought in $37,124.50, with average receipts per performance of $3,374.95.

\(^6\) Unfortunately, it cannot be determined how the receipts from the performances compared to the actual costs of mounting each of the Ring’s operas.
each assessed $2,500 for a box located in the Parterre and the First Tier (in recognition of their investment, their names and box location were published in the Metropolitan Opera’s program booklets beginning with the 1888–1889 season). To summarize, the proportion of total receipts that were from box office sales and subscriptions was approximately forty-six percent, from stockholders’ assessments about forty percent, and the remaining portion from rentals. 7

With the variation in the Metropolitan’s ticket prices, one could infer that the audiences at performances of the Ring operas were probably fairly diverse. Although specific demographic information is not available, details gleaned from the critical reports can provide a general impression. For the American premiere of Das Rheingold, the commentator for the New York Herald offered a particularly revealing observation in this respect:

[The opera] moved people in many ways, according to the standpoints from which they weighed it. A great Italian tenor, for instance, informed me that he regarded the performance as a failure. My neighbor in the stalls, who had never heard the work before, was pleasantly bewildered. The “four hundred” in the boxes were simply and unaffectedly bored. A strong Teutonic minority in the upper gallery boiled over with enthusiasm and applauded frenziedly. The great majority in the orchestra and upper boxes seemed indifferent, or rather gave up the struggle to understand very early indeed in the evening. 8

While this description of the various members of the audience tends towards the stereotypical, it does give some impression of the diversity reflected in the different parts of the auditorium. The boxes were evidently occupied by New York’s wealthy elite, notably the stockholders, their families, and guests. The list of box holders printed in the program books show that many of them were prominent American industrialists, financiers, and business magnates, including Cornelius and William K. Vanderbilt, William Waldorf Astor, James A. Roosevelt, John Pierpont Morgan, William Rockefeller, and Robert and Ogden Goelet. Significantly as well, about fifteen of the seventy-two boxes belonged specifically to married and unmarried women though they often shared ownership of the box with others (one exception was Astor’s wife, who had her own box, separate from her husband’s). The newspapers often described this portion of the

7 This is based on Krehbiel’s financial report for the Met’s 1887–1888 season in Chapters of Opera, 178.
8 New York Herald, 5 Jan 1889, 10.
audience as “fashionable” and “showy”.

The rest of the auditorium was likely filled with upper-middle and middle-class Americans who appeared to have varying degrees of experience with Wagner’s music. If the above observations of the Herald’s reporter were accurate, then the orchestra section and the upper boxes, whose members appeared to have struggled to understand the text being sung, were likely dominated by English-speaking Americans, who represented a gamut of neophytes and devotees to Wagnerian opera. The stalls were similarly filled, including those curious but relatively unfamiliar with the music and the language, as exemplified by the “pleasantly bewildered” gentleman who had sat next to the critic. By comparison, the galleries were reportedly crowded with attentive and appreciative German-Americans, who were exceptionally quiet during the performances, but otherwise responded with overwhelming enthusiasm, when applause was called for. Indeed, the galleries became known as a desirable part of the auditorium for music lovers of Wagner who wished to avoid being disturbed by the talkative elites. Apparently, many of them chose to sit there, even if they could afford to sit in the orchestra section. As Henry T. Finck observed,

Many of the stockholders have converted the ante-rooms to their boxes into luxurious parlors, into which they can retire and talk if the music bores them. But, unfortunately, there are some black sheep among them and their invited guests who do not make use of this privilege, but give the rest of the audience the benefit of their conversational accomplishments. The parquet often resents these interruptions, and hisses lustily until quiet is restored. There are not a few lovers of music who, although able to pay for parquet seats, frequent the upper galleries for fear of being annoyed by the conversation in the boxes. In the highest gallery the quiet of a tomb reigns supreme, and woe to anyone who comes late, or whispers, or turns the leaves of his score too noisily: he is immediately pierced with a volley of indignant hisses.9

Such reports indicate that these audiences were highly differentiated, with a core group of appreciative members drawn from the German-American community.

Given their burgeoning interest in Wagner since the 1876 Bayreuth Festival, it is not surprising that women formed a substantial portion of the audiences that saw the Ring operas at

9 “German Opera in New York,” 11.
the Metropolitan Opera. Some upper-class women had access to their own boxes; on the occasion they did not attend performances with their husbands, or if they were unmarried, it would be not uncommon for them to invite other women (i.e. mothers, daughters, sisters, female guests) to join them. Middle-class women, on the other hand, were much more likely to frequent the matinee presentations, if they did not (or could not) attend the evening performances.

According to Lilli Lehmann, the matinees at the Metropolitan were comprised of a mostly female audience, who were more modestly dressed and more solemn than their evening compatriots. As she recalled,

"On Saturday afternoons, and, later, also, on Wednesdays, matinees were given from two to half-past five o’clock, especially for subscribers living out of town, and attended chiefly by ladies only, who did not recognize any necessity for elaborate toilettes. The audience was serious, like the clothes that it wore, and it cannot be said that it looked very gay."

Such women would have attended at least twenty-four matinees of the Ring dramas during the German seasons, including eight of Die Walküre, six each of Siegfried and Götterdämmerung, and four of Das Rheingold.

Like some of their male counterparts, many of these female opera-goers were probably already acquainted with the music of the Ring, perhaps through excerpts performed in symphonic concerts, or through the numerous published piano and chamber arrangements created from these extracts, of which they were the primary consumers. Around this time as well, American women began to form societies aimed at cultivating audiences for art music, including Wagner opera; the Seidl Society of Brooklyn was one such organization. Not only did these groups sponsor performances, but they promoted the intellectual study of the composer’s

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theories and operas by encouraging members to read the available literature, and attend lectures, like Walter Damrosch’s recitals explaining the musical motives of the Ring.

**New York Newspapers and Critics’ Expectations**

The first American performances of the Ring operas by the company of the Metropolitan Opera received extensive press coverage in major newspapers and various weekly and monthly musical and cultural periodicals. In New York, articles appeared in the most prominent and widely-read dailies, including the *Herald, Tribune, Times*, and the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, the same papers that had sent correspondents to Bayreuth in 1876. Reviews, often written fresh after the performance and published the next morning, usually appeared in the middle section of daily newspapers, under the title “Music” or “Amusements.” Because of the limitations of time and available column space, they varied in length and substance. In general, the individual premieres of the cycle’s operas received the most detailed coverage, and reviews of subsequent performances, with their diminishing novelty value, were generally much shorter. Articles that appeared in monthlies, such as the American cultural journals *Harper’s* and *Scribner’s Magazines*, and popular periodicals such as *The Cosmopolitan*, offered more in-depth discussion of the dramatic and musical aspects of the operas as well as examination of the specific context of the stagings of these dramas.

During the Metropolitan’s German seasons, a new group of American critics took over the positions of the journalists who were sent to Bayreuth during the previous decade. These writers were salaried professionals like their previous counterparts, but had comparatively longer tenures with their papers. Many of them contributed to the monthly journals as well. Although newspapers reviews were mostly unsigned, the identities of some of these critics have been determined by other researchers. Furthermore, identifying the person behind the pen

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can help illuminate their specific critical expectations and idiosyncrasies of opinion.\textsuperscript{13} It is now commonly known that Henry Krehbiel (1854–1923) was the \textit{Tribune}'s main music critic from 1880 until his death. William J. Henderson (1857–1937) occupied the post at the \textit{New York Times} between 1887 and 1902; occasionally, he signed his lengthier reviews. Both men were prolific and articulate commentators on music and American musical culture, and were also prominent lecturers on musical topics in New York. The critics for the \textit{New York Herald} and the \textit{New Yorker Staats-Zeitung} from this period though, are still indeterminable. John P. Jackson, who reviewed the cycle’s premiere in Bayreuth for the \textit{Herald} in 1876, appeared to still be active with the paper in the 1880s, but it seems evident from the more skeptical tone of the reviews of the American performances, that it was not he who wrote them. He did, however, contribute a substantial article about the \textit{Ring} for the popular American magazine, \textit{The Cosmopolitan}.\textsuperscript{14} Henry T. Finck often wrote for the \textit{New York Post}, but his articles for popular magazines are more representative of his interests and opinions. Gustav Kobbé too, was more closely affiliated with the major cultural, literary and musical magazines of the time, though he was also a staff writer for the \textit{New York Sun}; he would later become the \textit{Herald}'s music critic at the turn of the twentieth century.

Most of these critics came from literary backgrounds, and were not themselves professional musicians, although several of them did have some training in music (e.g. Henderson, Finck, Kobbé), or were self-taught (e.g. Krehbiel). While each individual writer had characteristically broad interests and wrote widely on many topics, they appeared unified in their deep interest and engagement with Wagner’s theories and his operas, which were necessary qualifications for providing intelligent commentary on the \textit{Ring}. They also shared similar experiences of the music from the cycle’s operas. As with many general listeners, they would

\textsuperscript{13} I model my approach here to Christina Bashford’s study of the critical reception of the first performances of the late Beethoven string quartets by London Press in the 1830s to 1850; see “The Late Beethoven Quartets and the London Press, 1836–ca. 1850,” in \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 84, no. 1 (2000): 84–122.

\textsuperscript{14} “The Ring of the Nibelung,” in \textit{The Cosmopolitan} 6, no. 5 (Mar 1889): 415–33.
have heard orchestral excerpts from the cycle played in the concert halls; arrangements for domestic performance would also have been available. They would have had direct access to printed scores and the texts to the operas in the original German as well as in English translation. Published literature by Wagner and about Wagner was available as well, including Hans von Wolzogen’s thematic guide for the Ring. Furthermore, because of the obligations of their particular profession, these critics had consistent access and exposure to staged performances of Wagner’s works. Some of them attended the Bayreuth festivals throughout the 1880s; for performances of the Ring, they went to see European productions, such as in Munich and Dresden, where Finck and Krehbiel traveled. Meanwhile in New York, the German seasons at the Metropolitan Opera provided an abundance of premieres and performances of many of Wagner’s works. Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, and Rienzi became popular mainstays of the repertory, while the composer’s mature works—Die Meistersinger, Tristan und Isolde, the Ring operas—were slowly introduced. In sum, these critics had an unprecedented depth of experience which they drew on for their reviews of the Ring cycle’s early U.S. performances.

Perhaps what most distinguishes this group of writers from the previous “generation” was their zeal to build an American audience for American performances of Wagner’s works. From their standpoint, they were already convinced of the composer’s genius, as well as the significance of his theories and music, so they sought to use their positions in order to educate and influence readers to become patrons of Wagnerian opera. This stance was invariably regarded among them as a “progressive” one; as Henry T. Finck, asserted in an article for The Cosmopolitan:

In New York…the press is practically unanimous in favor of German opera, and the press, as a rule, is omnipotent in theatrical matters. I am convinced, for instance, that one of the principal reasons why Wagner was more rapidly acclimated in New York than in the German capitals is that most of the leading German critics are old men—too old to submit readily to Wagner’s revolutionary tendencies; whereas in New York all the critics are young men, who needed only a few good performances of Wagner’s operas to be filled with an enthusiasm for them, with which many of their readers could not help being
Their reviews for the early American presentations of the *Ring* operas strongly reflect this particular perspective.

**The Ring and the New York Press**

Several common themes of discussion are evident in these reviews. Although the specifics on what critics reported varied depending on their personal proclivities, they nevertheless shared a sense of mutual purpose towards their readers: first to assess the quality of the performances, and then to evaluate the dramatic and musical elements of the operas themselves. These journalists also debated how audiences should come to terms with the complexities of the cycle’s operas. In this light, the critics weighed the relevance of opera, particularly German opera to in American culture.

Concerning the performances themselves, the Metropolitan Opera stagings of the *Ring* operas were deemed by most accounts to be quite satisfactory, exhibiting some of the finest musical and dramatic interpretations ever seen by American audiences. It was unanimously agreed that the orchestra under Seidl’s direction was consistently excellent. Seidl, especially, was praised for his ability to manage the climactic moments of each opera to create the most excitement for the audience. The singers, for the most part, were commended for their interpretations. Although strong performances were anticipated, and mostly fulfilled, from Bayreuth veterans like Amalie Materna, Marianne Brandt, and Albert Niemann, it was the next “generation” of Wagnerian singers that made the greatest impression on Americans, especially Max Alvary as Siegfried, and Lilli Lehmann as Brünnhilde. Both were praised for their vocal skills, stamina, and acting abilities, as well as for the total embodiment of their roles. Emil Fischer also received many accolades for his portrayal of Wotan. To the New York critics, these

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vocalists exemplified the Wagnerian ideal of an “actor/singer”, which helped to create convincing presentations of the operas.

The visual aspects of these productions of the Ring operas, however, received mixed reactions. Some features were greatly admired. The scenery painted by Kautsky for Acts I and II in Siegfried and for Das Rheingold were regarded as “real works of art.” The forging of the sword was commended for being highly realistic, and the dragon in Siegfried was appreciated and enjoyed, far from being considered a ridiculous, childish joke. For some performances, the “magic fire” that surrounds Brünnhilde at the end of Die Walküre was executed successfully.

Other powerful “stage pictures” included the swimming Rhinedaughters guarding the gold, and the Valkyries during their “Ride”, resplendent in colorful costumes. Yet despite the admiration Gustav Kobbé expressed in his 1887 “behind-the-scenes” article for Scribner’s about the stage machinery at the Metropolitan and the special effects produced for the American Ring, there were some evident limitations. Henry Finck observed that the backstage arrangements were so “clumsy” that the usual fifteen-minute intermissions in which a stage change could be completed had to be extended to 25 minutes or half an hour. Lilli Lehmann, too, remembered the chaos and inefficiency that occurred backstage at the Metropolitan:

The intermissions were terrible in these already lengthy operas, and reminded one vividly of Bayreuth. The opera-house was not equipped for the newest mechanical demands; no one was accustomed to work rapidly, and so every change turned into a trial of patience for the German management and artists, and I was often brought to despair. It was delayed by requests like, “Please bring me a lath, please let me have another nail here, please fasten these steps, this barrier, this bench, the carpet. Then everything was attended to at a snail’s pace.

Krehbiel mentioned in his review of the American premiere of Siegfried that the lighting effects were far behind those of some European theatres, such as at Dresden. For the scenic transformations in Das Rheingold, it appeared the perforated steam pipe at the front of the stage was not deployed to create a “steam curtain”. Instead, an actual curtain that opened at the

16 “German Opera in New York,” 18.
17 Lehmann, My Path Through Life, 342.
18 New York Tribune, 10 Nov 1885, 4–5.
center, was used throughout the opera, and was alternately closed and drawn back during the transitions. According to the Tribune, this closing of the curtain distracted one’s attention from the “highly descriptive” music, and moreover, in Finck’s opinion, was probably the reason chatter erupted amidst various parts of the audience not aware of the listening etiquette for Wagner’s works. The Times critic also pointed out that the lowering of the curtain “sadly marred” the grand effect of a procession for Siegfried’s funeral march in the American premiere of Götterdämmerung.19

The productions received the most criticism for the scenes that required the representation of fire, such as the end of Die Walküre, Act III of Siegfried, and the final conflagration in Götterdämmerung. These effects evidently fell short, but it was the poor staging, or rather, the “non-production” of the last scene, that several reviewers decried. As the Herald’s critic vividly described:

The Rhine did not rise, neither did it fall. Of Woglinde, Wellgunde and Flosshilde not a trace, and Hagen quietly walked into the river, just as if he were about to take a surf bath. All this and more was left as has already been said, to the imagination. But it was assisted, on the other hand, by two execrable daubs representing the apotheosis of Siegfried, Brünnhilde and a great many others, and the exquisite poetry of the music was by this means completely destroyed.20

Henderson in the Times also lamented the poor stage effects in Götterdämmerung, blaming the directors for not lavishing enough funds for adequate scenery. He firmly believed that the costs would have been recuperated by a larger audience as a result of the improved presentation.21

Ultimately, the faults in the production of the individual Ring operas did not detract decisively from the aura of significance that surrounded these early American performances, and it appears the Metropolitan’s production team was keen to make improvements whenever possible. By the time Stanton’s company staged the complete cycle in March 1889, newspaper reports took notice of upgrades in the scenery and stage effects, particularly in

20 New York Herald, 26 Jan 1888, 10.
*Götterdämmerung*. The unity and consistency of the musical, visual, and dramatic elements also improved with each repeat presentation, as cast, orchestra, and the production team became more comfortable performing together. When the staging was found lacking, the strength of the musical performances by the singers and orchestra were felt to have offered compensation.

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One curious recurring theme in the reviews of New York critics concerning the *Ring* operas at the Metropolitan Opera was the tendency for them to compare the four operas to each other, in effect, seeing them as individual works rather than parts of a single cycle. By general consensus, *Das Rheingold* was regarded as the least interesting part, dramatically and musically, while *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* were deemed the most enjoyable. Krehbiel described the prologue as the “most trying” opera of the group, but did not explain why. Henderson was more specific, stating that he found *Das Rheingold* the “poorest”, because it lacked sufficient dramatic action, and while he thought the orchestral score with its various motives was impressive, he felt there was little beauty in the vocal parts. Such reports may well imply that the staging was inadequate, since *Das Rheingold* poses special challenges in this regard. Henry T. Finck and John P. Jackson both favored *Siegfried*, citing it as a “perfect music-drama”. According to Finck, *Siegfried* best exemplified Wagner's theories about opera, in that there was “such a minute correspondence every second, between the poetry, music and scenery. Every action and gesture on the stage is mirrored in the orchestra.”

Jackson found the opera the most uplifting of the cycle, with “one scene of idyllic beauty follow[ing] the other, each complete and beautiful in itself.”

Other critics, however, were initially skeptical as to whether American audiences could enjoy *Siegfried*. With each scene consisting of only two to three characters on stage, and no

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chorus or any kind of concerted singing, Krehbiel considered the opera the “longest and most
decisive step away from the ordinary conventions of the lyric theatre” that had yet been asked of
the audience to endure. Moreover, the fantastical elements of Siegfried, such as the dragon and
the woodbird, if not effectively staged could verge on the ridiculous, like the stuff of “children’s
pantomimes and idle spectacles.” But as it turned out, to the pleasant surprise of the critics,
Americans were generally most attentive to the performances of the opera. Some believed it
was because Siegfried was the least somber work of the cycle; the journalists of the Herald and
Times likened it to a “scherzo” of a symphony, full of “joyousness and spontaneity.” The Herald
writer also maintained that scenes such as the dramatic forging of the sword, the evocative
forest scene, and the climatic love duet of Act III of Siegfried exerted a wide appeal to both
trained musicians and to those with limited musical knowledge.

The critic of the Staats-Zeitung and Krehbiel of the Tribune, on the other hand, preferred
Götterdämmerung, because of its emphasis on the “human element”; Krehbiel felt the opera’s
characters drew a warmer sympathy from him, and in his view, the audience also showed itself
responsive. He thought as well that Götterdämmerung was more dramatically engaging and
faster-paced than the other operas of the cycle, writing that: “The play is full of action, and in the
piling up of scenic, musical and dramatic effects it overtops its predecessors in the tetralogy,
and forms a fitting climax and end to that wonderful creation.” The Herald’s critic agreed with
Krebiel’s assessment, stating that: “In no other work does Wagner so triumphantly demonstrate
his intimate knowledge of the stage and its effects as here. With what amazing rapidity, in spite
of many lengthy expositions, does the action proceed, and how naturally, how craftily is all this
accomplished!” One wonders though if the critic would have still offered such praise if
Götterdämmerung had been given in its entirety, without the large cuts that were made to the
score for its early American performances. Would this critic have been so impressed by

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Wagner’s Norns? By comparison, *Die Walküre* was not as highly esteemed by critics, even though it was the most performed of the *Ring* operas. There were some the notable, dramatic moments which they favored to mention in their reviews, such as the love duet in Act I, the Annunciation of Death, the Ride of the Valkyries, and Wotan’s Farewell. However, the long stretches of dialogue were still felt to be monotonous, a feature which the *Times* and *Herald* reviewers felt would prevent the opera from ever securing long-term popularity with American audiences.

On the New York performances of the complete *Ring* cycle in early 1889, there was generally less press criticism, perhaps because by then, the individual operas had become familiar in the Metropolitan company’s repertory. It seems that the presentation of a complete cycle was regarded as the inevitable outcome of the progressive introduction of each of its operas, rather than as a singular historic event. Reviews of the complete cycle were much shorter, usually a couple of brief paragraphs providing a general assessment of the performance, but otherwise, there was little in-depth discussion. This is not to say that critics did not recognize the value of hearing the entire cycle with the operas in the proper sequence. That critics often perceived the *Ring*’s operas as individual works while also belonging to the cycle might be explained by the notion that each of the *Ring* operas embodies a different genre type, that progress through, as Robert Bailey has argued, “the classical hierarchy of dramatic values—from pathos to comedy and finally tragedy.”


27 Both Robert Bailey and William Kinderman have since shown that larger musical structures are at play in shaping the dramatic progression of the *Ring* operas. Kinderman has revealed that the dramatic climax at Siegfried’s death in *Götterdämmerung* is articulated through a large-scale musical recapitulation of the tonal framework in the final scene in Act III of *Siegfried*; see his article, “Dramatic Recapitulation in Wagner’s...
Times felt Siegfried could not be properly understood without having digested the plot and music of Das Rheingold and Die Walküre. If one had not heard (or did not know) the “leading motives” first introduced in Rheingold, then, the reappearance and evolution of these musical phrases in Siegfried would fail to exert their full effect on the listener. In the Herald writer’s view, the audience would perhaps have reacted less complacently to the struggles between the characters in Siegfried if they knew how the dramatic situations had arisen from the context of Das Rheingold. Rather remarkably, William Henderson thought that it was actually a fault of the Ring cycle, that each opera could not stand alone as complete, since this allegedly undermined the ideal of “classic unities” within a dramatic work.

On the philosophical themes expressed in the dramatic plot of the operas, few critics ventured to interpret their meaning, perhaps because they were more preoccupied about how the American performances would fare. Horowitz’s argument that Gilded Age commentators saw the Ring as a “morality tale” which ends with a hopeful message on the redeeming power of love is not, in fact, very evident from the critical dialogue about the cycle within the press or even in the extended discussions published in the monthly periodicals. But they and American audiences did appear to identify with the vitality and spontaneity of Brünnhilde and Siegfried who, as Horowitz described, “…championed a new world, a realm of experience unencumbered by tortuous needs or thoughts”, and thus exuded something of the American “frontier” spirit.28 William Henderson thought both characters were exemplars of the “noble savage” type, “equipped with the untouched beauty of normal physical proportions and endowed with the grandeur of unrestricted elemental passions.”29 Krehbiel thought Siegfried represented the archetypal American; as he wrote in 1894,

There is something peculiarly sympathetic to our people in the character of the chief personages of the drama. In their rude forcefulness and freedom from restrictive

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28 Horowitz, Wagner Nights, 147.
conventions they might be said to be representative of the American people. They are so full of that vital energy which made us a nation.... Siegfried is a prototype, too, of the American people in being an unspoiled nature. He looks at the world through glowing eyes that have not grown accustomed to the false and meretricious.  

Did Wagner’s Siegfried, with his fresh strength and sometimes brutish naivete, his rejection of conventional ways and closeness to nature, speak especially to the American sensibility in this era? Or is it the character of the young Siegfried as a fairy-tale hero that found resonance? At the same time, Krehbiel saw Siegfried as a characteristic German:

It is the impetuous nature of the young hero, the typical German with his contempt for dissimulation and hypocrisy, his rough, straightforward energy, which is likely at any moment to come crashing through the veneers of social conventions, that is published in the music, and it is as refreshing as a lusty breeze through a pine forest.

Framed in this way, one can see how the hero’s character might have also strongly resonated with German-Americans who, frustrated with the political situation in their homeland, had taken the leap to pursue new lives in the New World of greater social mobility and material abundance. In the New York papers, including the *Staats-Zeitung*, critics did not speak of the *Ring* cycle as a nationalistic work intended exclusively for the German people. Rather, they promoted the notion that Germans and Americans alike shared the ideals of freedom, limitless possibilities, and unrestrained loves expressed in the work, which, in William Henderson’s view, made the dramas universally relevant and significant. As he wrote in the *New York Times*:

The feature that is most forcibly and adequately expressed in the Nibelung dramas is the elementary humanity of the heroes and heroines; and it is this universal manhood and womanhood, pristine, unhampered, uncivilized, which burns and glows through the three dramas…in the overwhelming fire of dramatic poetry. It is this which takes hold upon our hearts, which thrills us and renews us, which fill us with the spirit of youth.

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While New York critics were not inclined to debate on paper the various metaphysical ideas explored the *Ring*, they did examine and evaluate the dramatic and musical content of the

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33 *New York Times*, 5 Feb 1888, 12.
operas themselves. In doing so, their aim was to enlighten their readers about these aspects as much as they could within the limitations of time and the space constraints of their respective papers. Despite some obvious variation in their discursive styles, one notes a tendency to devote a substantial portion of the reviews to outlining the plot while blending in discussion about its musical aspects in an evocative, “story-telling” manner. Perhaps one of the best examples of this style is Krehbiel’s review of the American premiere of Siegfried for the New York Tribune. Here is his description of the “Waldweben” scene in Act II, Scene 2:

After a scene of no particular moment between two Nibelungs, Alberich and Mime, the most naively poetical and lovely scene in the whole tetralogy is reached. Siegfried throws himself on a hillock at the foot of a tree and listens to nature’s music in the forest. As an excerpt for concert purposes the music of a portion of the scene is familiar, but those who saw it for the first time last night must have marveled at the difference in effect caused by the stage picture. Siegfried is brooding over the mystery of his childhood, and he voices his thoughts in tender phrases, while soft-voiced instruments in the orchestra identify those with whom his mind is concerned. Suddenly the sunlight begins to flicker along the leafy canopy, a thousand indistinct voices are heard in that indefinable yet musical hum of which when heard in reality and not through the musician’s creation one is at a loss to tell how much is actual and how much the product of imagination, both sense and fancy having been miraculously quickened by the spirit which moves through the trees. At last all is vocal, and Siegfried, who shows himself susceptible to the very influence that we have been attempting to describe, finds himself longing to understand a bird that sings overhead.34

This is an idealized depiction of the drama as it unfolded on stage in conjunction with the music. After outlining the entire plot in this manner, Krehbiel usually follows with his assessment of the actual performance. This organizational strategy was employed by many critics perhaps because it made the content of the reviews attractive to a broad range of readers, not just those who were already knowledgeable about the operas and who attended the performances, but also others who were curious about them on a more basic level.

Some of the critics apparently tried to accommodate this latter group, by shifting the focus of their reviews away from the various “leitmotivs” in the music of the operas. Krehbiel was one who explicitly avoided motivic analyses in his newspaper reviews. While explaining the

34 New York Tribune, 10 Nov 1887, 4–5.
significance of Siegfried’s horn call, for example, he practically apologized for falling
momentarily into the “analysis trap” (italics mine for emphasis):

It is [Siegfried’s] own characteristic horn call which [Wagner] expands into a joyous
fanfare—the same phrase which, given out with tremendous breadth, forms the climax of
his funeral march in “Die Gotterdammerung.” To this he adds the melody which, in
Wotan’s farewell to Brünnhilde (“Die Walküre”), is a prophetic symbol of the future of the
future heroic Siegfried. The melodious freshness and poetical ingenuousness of the
scene cannot be described in words. We have been forced by the attempt into a bit of
analysis, a result which is nothing so fatal to the aims of a critic as in music.\textsuperscript{35}

In another instance, this time concerning Siegfried’s funeral march in \textit{Götterdämmerung},
Krehbiel challenged anyone who could effectively explain the emotional power of the scene
through dry analysis:

Ah! That death march! Where in the literature of music shall we look for its like? Let the
cold-blooded analyst dissect it, tell of the phrases out of which it is built, and marvel that
“Siegfried’s” simple horn-call could be metamorphosed into so colossal a hymn as that
which marks its climax, one may feel its beauty to the full without getting within this
technical sway. Such knowledge, indeed, may add keenness to our appreciation, but
without it we recognized music which tells of the death of a demi-god and of his deeds.

Of course, Siegfried’s death scene does receive a powerful musical-dramatic treatment that
goes far beyond mere motivic recall and indeed invites serious analysis.\textsuperscript{36}

The \textit{Herald}’s critic likewise avoided extensive musical analyses in his reviews, resorting
to only a brief mention of some of the motives whenever applicable. In his (rather narrow)
opinion, the only part of the American audience that would appreciate such analyses were
Germans. “To the rest”, he wrote, “they are as obscure as those characters in Alexandre
Dumas’s later novels which nobody can understand unless he has read about sixty-four of the
previous volumes.”\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps there was some truth to his statement because the critic for the
German-American paper, the \textit{New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung}, chose to focus his reviews on the
motives, naming them and explaining to his readers how they were introduced and developed
throughout the entire cycle. Among the critics of English-language papers, only the \textit{New York

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} As discussed in Kinderman, “Dramatic Recapitulation in Wagner’s \textit{Götterdämmerung}.”
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{New York Herald}, 31 Jan 1885, 4.
Times writer William Henderson appeared to incorporate in his articles some musical analysis of the various motives of the operas and their development. Perhaps his formal musical training made Henderson more comfortable with doing so when necessary. To compare, this is what Henderson penned about a motive that appears in the second part of the prologue of Götterdämmerung, the scene with Siegfried and Brünnhilde:

One of these, which is a singularly effective modification of the motive of Siegfried’s courage, heard in “Siegfried” and always intoned by the hero on his hunting horn, is indicative of his now fully matured heroism. The change is technically made by altering the rhythm of the motive from six-eighth [sic] to common time, thus transforming its brilliant vivacity into marital dignity.  

Clearly, only a reader who had some musical education and could examine the score to this scene would be able to ascertain whether Henderson’s observation was valid or not.

Whether or not critics chose to analyze the Ring operas’s motives in their reviews, it is evident that Hans von Wolzogen’s analytical guide from 1876 continued to influence the manner in which they discussed the cycle’s music. The American critics of this period were already convinced of Wagner’s genius and had accepted his “system” of composition using “leading motives”, which the cycle’s operas exemplified. That this analytical approach itself was flawed and only loosely connected to Wagner was an issue that concerned them. Thus, in their articles, they sought to encourage Americans to master knowledge of the motives as a primary route to achieving a deeper understanding of the entire Ring, and a fuller appreciation of the composer’s skill and ingenuity. As the New York Times critic stated in a review of Die Walküre, even though a “superficial listener” could still find the music appealing, “it may safely be affirmed that until the listener of the Tetralogy has mastered…all [the themes] he will not quite realize the eloquence and ingenuity of the composer’s lyric narrative.”

Krehbiel and John P. Jackson, the former

music critic of the *Herald*, supported this view as well. Both asserted that if one does not know the motives, then one misses the dramatic significance of the orchestra part, which they characterized as the “invisible Greek chorus” in Wagnerian music-drama. As Jackson neatly described it to readers of *The Cosmopolitan*, the orchestra plays the “leading musical themes” which “explains to the auditor the psychological significance of the scenes upon the stage, and carries him along with the story.”41 Similarly, in his instructive article, “How to Listen to Wagner’s Music”, for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Krehbiel explained that:

> The music of the instrument is the voice of fate, the conscience, and the will concerned in the drama. It unfolds the thoughts, motives, and purposes of the personages, and lays bare the mysteries of the plot and counterplot. As the tragedy grows complex, the musical texture, into which the themes symbolizing the passions and purposes of the characters are woven, grows more complex and heterogeneous.42

It bears mentioning that Krehbiel did not advocate for American audiences to merely memorize the musical motives of the *Ring* as if semantically-fixed “labels” for persons, objects, etc. on the stage but that they should regard the motives as aural symbols to which are connected “real” and “absolute” emotional elements of the drama. This interpretation fairly accurately describes Wagner’s original idea of associative motives in the orchestral part, as “signposts for the emotions” as the listener watched the narrative unfold. However, Krehbiel clarifies that this approach did not mean one should seek a purely emotional experience of the operas “without the intellectual processes.” Even though one could very well enjoy the composer’s works in this manner, he noted that “if we put aside this intellectual activity, we will deprive ourselves, among other things, of the pleasure which it is the province of memory to give; and the exercise of memory is called for by music much more urgently than by any other art…”43 In essence, he suggests that the drama of the *Ring* is best experienced through rigorous and attentive listening of the music in conjunction with the staging.

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41 “The Ring of the Nibelung,” 431.
42 Vol. 80 (March 1890): 530–36; 34.
43 Ibid.
Ultimately, these American critics sought to make their readers aware that the *Ring* cycle demanded a new kind of reception from them, if they desired to enjoy this epic work. As we know from his theoretical writings as well as the context he created for the cycle’s premiere at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival, Wagner had intended to guide audience conduct in the opera house so that one’s entire attention was focused on the artwork being performed on stage. The removed location of the Festival and the design of the *Festspielhaus* were also created to foster this kind of reception. But since the setting of American theatres, both physical and social, were not always conducive to this purpose, critics felt the need to instruct Americans on how to cultivate a similar atmosphere, by refraining from conversation during the orchestral interludes, and withholding applause until the end so as not to disrupt the progress and illusion of the drama.

Moreover, they advised that audience members “prepare” for performances through the concerted study of the *Ring’s* text and the score. If the inability of reading music prevented the latter, the critics suggested that Americans attend the many available lecture-recitals which explained the plot and the various musical motives in the *Ring’s* operas; at the time, Walter Damrosch’s sessions were especially popular. In Finck’s view, persistent study would soon give way to honest appreciation: “if he has once taken the trouble to study them, he becomes an enthusiast for life; for he constantly discovers new and beautiful details which had previously escaped his notice.” No longer would the operas be merely entertaining but one would enjoy them “rapturous; “is not such pleasure worth cultivating, even if it involves some toil at first?”, he asks the reader.\(^{44}\)

Above all, the American critical discourse concerning the music of the *Ring* centered on how the work facilitated the moral uplift, education, and self-improvement of its audiences; as Joseph Horowitz has pointed out in his studies *Wagner Nights* and *Moral Fire*, this was a distinctively American response to the composer’s operas during the late-nineteenth century.

\(^{44}\)“German Opera in New York,” 20.
American critics began touting German opera, of which the *Ring* was an exemplar, as a "serious endeavor". In doing so they began to describe Italian and French grand opera as an "amusement" or "entertainment" because in their view, audiences drawn to these performances were perceived to be going to opera as a social diversion, and to be regaled by star singers performing pleasing tunes (admittedly, their tone in this respect was somewhat condescending). By comparison, a work such as Wagner's *Ring* might be more readily regarded as an "artwork" containing fundamentally human themes worthy of contemplation. As the *New York Times* critic mused:

> Musical amateurs are beginning to understand that music is not a thing simply for the tickling of ears and the amusement of the moment. It is beginning to stand in the estimation of thinking men and women beside the most elevated drama and poetry...As these ideas spread among the people the world is better prepared to listen with sympathy to such production as 'Die Walküre'...\(^{45}\)

This journalist believed as well that the diligence of the American audience to engage deeply with the music of the *Ring* operas indicated an elevation in their taste, and thus, was evidence of their cultural progressivism. Reflecting on a performance of *Götterdämmerung* at the Metropolitan Opera, he wrote,

> The public has ceased to regard the opera as a resort for an hour's amusement, and have accept it as a serious form of art to be approached in a studious mood. This condition of public taste is unquestionably higher than any which it has known in the past, and paves a broad and open way for larger achievements in the future.\(^{46}\)

Similarly, the critic of the *Independent* newspaper praised the efforts of the directors and company at the Metropolitan Opera for this apparent “advance in art-education”. At last the theatre, he declared after the American premiere of *Götterdämmerung*, was not just an avenue for operatic entertainment, but “an institution that has become primarily a center of musical education, an art school for all within reach of its powerful influences.”\(^{47}\)

To this end, the New York critics sought to affect American public response towards the

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\(^{46}\) *New York Times*, 17 Feb 1888, 4.

\(^{47}\) *The Independent*, 2 Feb 1888, 9.
Ring by encouraging the public to continue to support and sustain performances of the cycle in the U.S. The notion framed part of their broader endorsement of the universality of German opera to Americans, and thus the genre’s worthiness of assimilation in the American context. At the time, these journalists were concerned about the future of the cycle in America. They wondered whether the purported intellectual demands the work put on its listeners would be a deterrent to attendance, and in the end, preclude future presentations of the operas. William Henderson considered the issue after attending a repeat performance of Siegfried at the Metropolitan. Although he found that his increasing familiarity with the opera revealed fresh and deeper insights into the score, he noted, “It must be admitted, however, that the necessity of this continued study militates against the general popularity of Wagner. The public is loath to acknowledge that the opera is a high form of art, and not a mere amusement.”

The critic for the New York Herald thought that American enthusiasm for the Ring would eventually wane, unless there were enough repeat performances to sustain the development of open appreciation for this kind of opera. As he wrote: “Until the public learns to understand that works of genius such as these—works that have taken years of unremitting labor, care and thought—are worth listening to, not once or twice, but a lifetime, opera cannot and will not succeed here.” In the view of Finck, the future of the Ring, and consequently, German/Wagner opera, would depend on lovers of the artform to evangelize to their friends that multiple hearings of a work would, in time, transform bewilderment into enjoyment. To “permanently sustain German opera”, he wrote in The Cosmopolitan, required the enlargement of the operatic public, which, … can only be done by means of a concerted action of all admirers of the opera. Let them keep on, with “damnable iteration,” to drum into their friends’ heads the fact that if they will only make up their minds to attend one good opera three or four times in succession they will become devoted admirers of it the rest of their lives. The friends will finally consent, in pure self-defense, to try the experiment; and in three cases out of four they will become converted and admit that German operatic music is indeed a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

49 New York Herald, 26 Jan 1888, 10.
50 Finck, “German Opera in New York,” 19.
At the time, there was no evidence of diminishing American interest in the *Ring* operas. Just as the world premiere of the *Ring* had drawn Americans to Bayreuth, the cycle’s operas first performances in the U.S. captivated them in New York. The New York reviews of these presentations bore witness to the critics’ various objectives to assess how the productions fared, to describe the operas, and explicate Wagner’s theories (as well as correct misunderstandings about these aspects), and above all, to encourage Americans to seriously engage with this epic dramatic cycle. Perhaps more so than other journalists in the past, these critics were not shy to distinguish themselves as experts on Wagner and his music. In their desire to educate the American public, several of them wrote Wagner biographies and operatic analyses published during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The most notable of these include: Henry Krehbiel’s *Studies in the Wagnerian Drama* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891); William J. Henderson’s *Richard Wagner: his Life and his Dramas* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1901); Henry T. Finck’s two volume *Wagner and His Works* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893; translated into German in 1897); and Gustav Kobbé’s *Wagner’s Life and Works*, also in two volumes (New York: G. Schirmer, 1890 and 1896). Some critics, such as Krehbiel and Henderson, became active public lecturers on Wagner’s music as well. In general, their efforts to build a diverse and appreciative audience for Wagnerian opera were considered to be successful. As John P. Jackson expressed in *The Cosmopolitan*:

> The love of Wagner’s music is deeply rooted in New York. Not only do the great music-dramas draw immense audiences, but society itself, that is, the intelligence of the city, is interested in the Wagnerian movement. New York audiences are not demonstrative in approval or disapproval, but they make their influence felt nevertheless. They have a true feeling for what is true and perfect in art, and do not hesitate to put their stamp of approval upon such when found.\(^5\)

It remained to be seen how the *Ring* cycle would fare in other American cities and how their critics would respond.

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Part II: The American Ring on Tour, 1889

Following the performance of two full Ring cycles at the Metropolitan Opera, Stanton organized a post-season tour for his company to present the tetralogy in five American cities. Lasting for seven weeks, it began in Philadelphia on March 25, followed by a stop in Boston, then west to Milwaukee and Chicago, and ended in St. Louis on May 11. The company performed one entire cycle in each city, except in Boston, where it was given twice; Boston and Chicago also received single performances of Das Rheingold, Siegfried and Götterdämmerung. Besides the Ring, other works by Wagner—Die Meistersinger, Tannhäuser, and Lohengrin—were given in various cities as well, and Beethoven’s Fidelio had a single presentation in Boston. In total, the company gave forty-two performances.

The 1889 tour was the Stanton company’s most notable venture outside of New York to date, especially since they were bringing the Ring. Only Die Walküre was brought to Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia previously, in 1885. The company stopped in St. Louis on its 1886 tour but it performed Tannhäuser, Rienzi, and Lohengrin, and no part of the Ring. Milwaukee, however, had never been visited by the troupe before so their appearance there was a particularly momentous event. To date, the touring production of the Metropolitan’s Ring has only been given a general overview by Quaintance Eaton. The following discussion seeks to expand on her earlier examination, by providing further details about the tour, and how the performances fared as the company contended with the variations in acoustics, size of stage and auditorium, and available technology in the theatres they performed. As there are no extant archival materials on the particulars of the tour, we once again rely on the extensive contemporary accounts from the cities’ major newspapers. Although these reviews have their limitations, they nevertheless contain a sizable amount of information on the performances, and

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reveal something of the regional differences in the prevailing views on Wagner’s cycle—and more generally, his theories and music from the perspectives of the critics who wrote them.

The Tour

The full tour schedule and roster of Stanton’s German opera company of the Metropolitan Opera appear in Appendix G. As Neumann’s “Traveling Wagner Theatre’s” pan-European circuit of the Ring had shown in 1882–1883, touring with the cycle was a difficult endeavor requiring extensive resources. The American troupe consisted of 160 persons, including a 60-piece orchestra, 31 singers, and various stage personnel (among them, 26 stage hands and 15 carpenters, property men and stage clearers). They traveled in a special train comprised of four sleeper cars, one day coach and five baggage cars; an additional six cars carried the Metropolitan’s scenery for all the operas. The company’s roster of artists had the benefit of several veterans from the Neumann tour, including the conductor Anton Seidl, who had freed himself from all European engagements in order to lead the performances. The singers were nearly all from the Metropolitan’s regular season, with a few substitutions and alterations: in the Ring, Anna Marie Baumann-Triloff replaced Fanny Moran-Olden in the role of Brünnhilde in Die Walküre for the performances in Philadelphia and Boston; Lilli Lehmann was Sieglinde for those same performances but played the Valkyrie in Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis, for which Felicié Kaschowska assumed Sieglinde. In Siegfried, Max Alvary took the title role, but Lehmann’s husband, Paul Kalisch, portrayed the hero for Götterdämmerung. Walter Damrosch also joined the tour, paving the way in advance of the company’s arrival in each city, by preparing audiences with his popular lecture-recitals on the Ring. As Lilli Lehmann remembered, the tour was “very hard work” and full of complications, such as the drawbacks that came with travelling with all the scenery. Sometimes this involved subtle actions on stage that Wagner never envisioned:
Sometimes rats gnawed the feathers on the unpacked *Walküre* helmets, or such things occurred as happened to Kalisch at the close of the *Götterdämmerung*, when he, as Siegfried, lay on the bier, with Gutrune standing in front of him, and his whole body began to itch so that he was obliged to ask her to scratch him, because he could not endure it a moment longer. When he got up, he was covered all over with blisters, caused by vermin that had got in the fur covers on the way.\(^{53}\)

One of the major challenges that Stanton’s company had to face was how to adapt their production from the Metropolitan Opera to the conditions of the various opera houses where they performed. The Chicago Opera House was smaller than the Metropolitan, with a stage that was just over half the size of the stage at the Metropolitan Opera House, though the capacity was a sizeable 2,300. According to the *Daily Inter-Ocean*, however, it boasted some of the “most modern mechanical devices of bridges and traps” for scenic effects. In Philadelphia, the company appeared at the Academy of Music, the same theatre in which *Die Walküre* was premiered by the Neuendorff-Fryer troupe in 1877; it had a horseshoe-shaped auditorium that could seat 2,900. Milwaukee’s Academy of Music Theatre was also similarly arranged and comparable in size. The Boston Theatre was perhaps closest to the size of the Metropolitan, with a seating capacity of 3,140, and a relatively large stage, though with an irregular shape that was much deeper on the side toward the south. In 1888 ten feet was cut from the stage so that audiences could be closer to the performers. Even larger was the Grand Music Hall in St. Louis’s Exposition Building, which was completed the same year as New York’s Metropolitan Opera (the other theatres were built in the 1850s or 1860s). The Music Hall housed one of the nation’s biggest stages (it was reported that it could fit 1,500 people) and an auditorium with a considerable seating capacity of 3,500.

**Newspapers, Critics, and Expectations**

As in New York, critics of major newspapers of each city on the tour route covered the Stanton company’s performances of the *Ring* cycle. The reviews examined for this dissertation are from the following English-language papers: *The North American* of Philadelphia; the

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Boston *Globe* and *Daily Advertiser* of Boston; the *Milwaukee Sentinel* and *Daily Journal*; the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Daily Inter-Ocean*; and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. We can judge from the general quality of their articles that these journalists appeared to have had some musical training and/or broad literary interests, and thus, were able to discuss the *Ring* operas in quite a sophisticated manner. Most reviews were unsigned except those by the Boston critics, Louis C. Elson (1848–1920), who wrote for the *Advertiser*, and Howard Malcolm Ticknor (1836–1905), of the *Globe*. Some details about the latter's backgrounds are known. Elson had received extensive formal musical training in Boston and at the Leipzig Conservatory. After a period in Germany, he returned to the U.S. in 1877 to work for several music journals; in 1880, he began teaching at the New England Conservatory and was soon made the head of its theory department. From 1886 until his death, Elson was the music editor of the *Boston Courier* and the *Daily Advertiser*, and was also a prominent public lecturer and prolific writer on musical topics.\textsuperscript{54} Ticknor was the son of a founding member of the renowned Boston publishing house, Ticknor, Reed and Fields, and he himself also became a major figure in the city's literary scene. After his undergraduate education at Harvard, he spent two years in Italy studying vocal music. When Ticknor returned to the United States, he became assistant editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Between 1868 and 1878, he went back to Italy as a Vice Consul, after which he resumed living in the U.S. for good, teaching elocution at Harvard and Brown Universities. He also worked as a musical and dramatic critic for various Boston papers, and later, he succeeded his father at Ticknor, Reed and Fields, where he remained until his death.\textsuperscript{55}

By 1889, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Louis were already well-established stops visited by major orchestras (like Theodore Thomas’s orchestra) and opera companies on tour. It is likely that critics and Americans in these cities were already acquainted

\textsuperscript{54} See “Elson, Louis C.,” in *Grove Online*, by Karl Kroeger.

\textsuperscript{55} See Ticknor’s obituary in the *New York Times*, 15 May 1905. The firm of Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, was chiefly responsible for the publication of many important American literary works, including those by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Oliver Wendall Holmes, among others.
with the music of Wagner’s operas in concert excerpts, and may have also witnessed stagings of some of his earlier works, such as \textit{Tannhäuser} and \textit{Lohengrin}, which were frequently performed by the company of the Metropolitan Opera on their post-season circuits. Otherwise, most Americans outside New York had little opportunity to experience staged performances of the \textit{Ring} operas unless they expressly traveled to see the presentations at the Metropolitan Opera House. As some New York critics have observed, “pilgrims” from other cities did sometimes come, such as for the first American cycle. Certainly, there were many reporters from other cities who traveled to New York to witness the premieres of the individual \textit{Ring} operas in order to write accounts of them for their local newspapers. It was mentioned in the \textit{New York Tribune}, for instance, that Howard Malcolm Ticknor of the \textit{Globe} was present at the American premiere of \textit{Siegfried}.

In bringing the complete \textit{Ring} cycle to these other U.S. cities, Stanton’s company offered many of these Americans their first-time encounters with the work. To prepare for the performances, a significant number attended Walter Damrosch’s lecture-recitals, the format of which consisted of Damrosch at the piano, giving “an hour and a half of informal talk, interspersed with illustrations on the instrument, a concise, comprehensive, and thoroughly intelligible account of the incidents…translating parts of the dialogue and explaining the relations of the various motives to the action.”\textsuperscript{56} Six of these events were devoted to the \textit{Ring} cycle. They were attended chiefly by women, since it was often women’s societies that sponsored them; the Milwaukee newspapers, for example, recorded that “several prominent ladies of Milwaukee” had requested for Damrosch to appear there. Evidently, beyond New York, women were a driving force in the cultivation of appreciation for Wagner’s music. Local critics were also interested in the lecture-recitals, and thought the events themselves merited commentary in the newspapers. Generally, they found that Damrosch’s method, though simple, was very successful in preparing Americans for the \textit{Ring} performances, especially those who

had limited musical abilities and could not study the scores for themselves. Damrosch himself viewed the task with a missionary’s zeal; as he told the *Chicago Tribune*,

> I am here [in Chicago] to preach the Wagnerian gospel, and during the coming weeks I hope in a series of recitals to prepare the way for a more intelligent reception of the German opera which I shall then bring to Chicago. […] It is almost impossible…for one to appreciate the Wagnerian music we shall give without a preliminary study of the same. We are forced to give the opera in German, of course, and the music and the words are so intimately related that one should know beforehand all about the operas that is possible. In my recitals I shall recite the words and then give the musical phrasing.\(^5\)

**The Performances and Their Reception**

*Scenery and Stage Effects*

In comparing the critical responses to the stagings of the Stanton company’s *Ring* on tour, a couple of considerations should be kept in mind. One is that the variations in the size and extent of the technical arrangements of the opera houses in which the troupe performed inevitably affected the way the scenery and stage effects were produced and how they came across to audiences during these presentations. Another issue is that differences in opinion about the stage settings witnessed could be attributed, in part, to the extent of a critic’s prior experience of staged performances of the *Ring*—that is, a wholly positive evaluation may suggest relative inexperience, whereas a more critical standpoint may reflect more extensive exposure. This may explain, for example, the rather high commendation given by the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* critic on the staging he saw versus the more critical, and perhaps more objective, reviews that appeared in the Boston, Chicago, and Milwaukee papers. On the other hand, some reporters, like the one for the Philadelphia daily, *The North American*, said little about the staging or resorted to a one-line comment; this likely suggests a lack of column space or limited time to write the review, rather than a lack of interest. Nevertheless, what commentary on the visual aspects of these performances of the *Ring* operas is offered in these periodicals merits examination.

\(^5\) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 Apr 1889, 3.
The staging of Das Rheingold received mixed evaluations. In Milwaukee, the Sentinel reported that the stage setting was “gorgeous and realistic”, especially the opening scene, under the Rhine, and following that, mostly everything proceeded smoothly with no evident delays. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch was more moderate in its evaluation, stating that the scenery was “adequate”, though made more effective by the musical interpretation since “there were no gorgeous pictures.” In Boston, however, Elson for the Advertiser and Ticknor of the Globe were quite disappointed by the quality of the stage settings. The latter thought the Metropolitan’s scenery did not appropriately fill out the stage of the Boston Theatre and thus was very ineffective from a distance. The backdrop for Valhalla, for example, was especially crude, with the “wondrous castle” consisting “principally of two very rectangular and ugly towers.” The critic of the Chicago Inter-Ocean felt similarly about the Chicago performance, about which he noted that Valhalla was not “heavenly in its charm” and lacked “lightness, brightness, and aerial perspective.” He also agreed with Elson that the setting of Nibelheim could have been more impressive, and that the characterization of the Nibelungs could have been more obviously grotesque and labored, so that their movements would seem less meaningful. Ticknor though, found this aspect realistic enough.

Some effects were eschewed altogether, like the gradual transformation between the scenes, whereby breaks were inserted to accommodate the changing of scenery (the Milwaukee critic noted that the scene changes occurred more quickly than he expected). There were also some unfortunate mishaps that undermined the sense of illusion: in the second scene when Freia is taken away by the giants, resulting in the gods’ aging, Elson stated that the “diffusion of light and its gradual withdrawal from the gods” was “executed with alarming suddenness.” The Milwaukee Sentinel similarly reported that “the light was turned on and shut

58 Milwaukee Sentinel, 17 Apr 1889, 1.
59 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 7 May 1889, 28.
60 Boston Globe, 2 Apr 1889, 4.
61 Chicago Inter-Ocean, 23 Apr 1889, 4.
off too suddenly many times last evening” and furthermore, the lighting in the auditorium could have been darker to improve the view of the stage. In Boston, Alberich’s disappearance and appearance in the third scene was “bungled and contrived”, and the dragon he transformed into was felt to have looked too much like a prop. The Chicago Tribune’s critic also thought the dragon unconvincing, consisting only of a head which only “rolled its eyes hideously” and disappeared. Ticknor, who had seen the New York productions also, remarked that he thought several effects were better achieved at the Metropolitan than in the Boston Theatre. Although he understood there might be differences, he found the representation of the Rhine in Boston “fell much below the New York original” and that the rainbow bridge “was in more than one aspect too low down.” The latter effect appeared to have been improved for the Milwaukee performance, for the Sentinel’s critic thought it, and the preceding storm, surpassed the way it was done at Bayreuth in 1876.

The stage settings for Die Walküre were received more positively than those for Das Rheingold. The St. Louis-Dispatch reported that the scenery was “the best and just what the composer intended with a few impossible exceptions”, with the “magic-fire scene” at the end being particularly realistic. The Boston critics focused almost no attention on the scenic effects, except that Elson expressed his relief that there was no live horse for Grane at the opening of the second act. The Milwaukee Sentinel as well as the Chicago Tribune and Inter-Ocean, however, revealed that the Metropolitan’s scenery could not be used on the smaller stages of the Academy of Music Theatre and the Chicago Opera House, and that in both those houses, the sets needed to be cobbled together from stock scenery. The Sentinel stated that “No attempt was made yesterday to parallel or even emulate the scenic display and perfection of this music-drama as it was staged in Bayreuth. It was all conventionally done.” Notably, Hunding’s hut in Act I was “patched out by set pieces like the flight of stairs leading to the bed

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62 St. Louis-Dispatch, 8 May 1889, 9.
63 Boston Advertiser, 3 Apr 1889, 4.
chamber, and the table, which might do in a nineteenth-century frontier scene, but not here. In Act II the setting of the “rocky wilderness” was “skillfully built up” but the various platforms were not sufficiently masked to create the proper illusion. Furthermore, “it was pieced out with a drop belonging to the Academy’s stock scenery, good enough in its way, but out of place in that scene.” The Chicago Inter-Ocean similarly noted that the settings had been hastily put together but “they served the emergency.” Sometimes the stage action was poorly coordinated, such as in the Chicago presentation of the fight between Siegmund and Hunding, in which Wotan interferes, at the end of Act II. To enable the god’s passage through the clouds (as in Wagner’s directions), he was apparently borne on a concealed car. However, as the Chicago Tribune’s critic reported, the timing was off in the performance:

He should have arrived in season to interpose his spear, that Siegmund’s sword might break upon it. But by some mishap his train was late and he consequently was unable to be present at the important juncture in season to be of any use. So the sword did not break according to the program. In fact, Hunding’s spear was buried into Siegmund’s bosom before Wotan was near enough to carry out his part of the program.

In other words, in this production Wotan’s delay enabled Siegmund to face Hunding with an unbroken sword but Nothung still failed him in the contest.

On the other hand, some effects were not even attempted, perhaps to simplify the staging and thus reduce the risk for mistakes. At the beginning of Act III, Stanton’s company did not bother to literally depict the “Ride of the Valkyries” even though the Sentinel’s critic thought the projected slides used at Bayreuth (which he thought a “triumph”) could have also worked at the Academy. Concerning the realism of the “magic fire” at the end of the act, there were differing opinions: while the St. Louis-Dispatch critic found the effect particularly effective, the Inter-Ocean thought the Chicago version appeared “crude and ineffective” compared to its execution at the Metropolitan Opera House. The Sentinel’s journalist also felt the fire was not that convincing visually, but that this was atoned for by the superb performances of the orchestra, and Lilli Lehmann (Brünnhilde) and Emil Fischer (Wotan).

64 Milwaukee Sentinel, 18 Apr 1889, 1.
Of the stagings of the *Ring* operas on the tour, the scenery and effects for *Siegfried* appeared to be the best achieved. The complex coordination of electric lights, gas, and steam for the hero’s forging of the sword in the first act appeared to have been successfully carried out on the tour as in New York, and all the critics commended Stanton’s company for creating a realistic picture. Kautsky’s painted drops for the Act II forest were also praised by the Milwaukee *Sentinel* for their lifelike detail, and the various sky and cloud effects of Act III were deemed the “finest.” Only the effectiveness of Siegfried’s battle with the dragon was debatable. In his review the *Sentinel’s* critic quoted Wagner’s stage directions to show that the performance did not quite adequately fulfill the composer’s vision. Apparently, the moment lacked a dramatic struggle, for though the dragon was a “fearful looking object, possessed of red eyes like a switch light, and its nostrils emitting steam […] when it raised its tail Siegfried found no difficulty in dodging beneath it and administering a savage jab at its most vulnerable part.” Elson had a similar opinion of the Boston performance, observing that the dragon basically gave Siegfried a “vapor bath”, while Eugene Weiss as Fafner’s voice sang terribly out of tune. Things seemed to have improved by the company’s performance of the opera in Chicago, for the *Tribune’s* critic was surprised to find the dragon was managed by the Metropolitan’s machinists better than expected. Weiss, who sang through a speaking trumpet from underneath a bridge below the dragon’s head, was also found to be satisfactory. The critic noted that the bass’s position furthermore created a unique effect that enhanced the dramatic power of the scene “impart[ing] his voice not only an unusual power, but [also] a strange, almost unearthly quality admirably suited to the purpose.”

The effects in *Götterdämmerung* seemed to be often less well-managed than the other operas. Elson of the *Advertiser* thought the physical staging in Boston was probably the least adequate of all its aspects, though overall, the performance was memorable. In a similar vein,

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65 *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 19 Apr 1889, 2.
66 *Chicago Tribune*, 25 Apr 1889, 5.
the critic of the *Milwaukee Daily Journal* reported tersely that, “The scenic effects were probably all that could be attained on a small stage.”67 Among the problems too was the use of a live horse for Grane for the opening and final scenes of the opera. Lilli Lehmann remembered that there was a different animal used in each city: “here it was a pony, there it was drayhorse.”68 The use of live animals must have provided some unexpected twists and unintended humor. The horse was apparently “well-behaved” in Chicago but in Boston, the animal at one point ran Siegfried off the stage. On occasion, the lack of room on stage resulted in a clumsy scenic arrangement: for instance, the Gibichung chorus in the Boston Theatre was placed awkwardly in the gallery instead of on-stage with Hagen; Elson remarked in the *Daily Advertiser* that this was a defect that ought never to have occurred in this opera. The latter part of Act III, from Siegfried’s death to the final conflagration, received particularly mixed reviews, as the company continued to struggle with its staging. On the one hand, the critic for the *Sentinel* reported that the Milwaukee staging was “magnificent”, especially the conflagration, though he did not elaborate further.69 The Boston papers, on the other hand, more realistically reported that there was no real attempt to actualize some of Wagner’s seemingly impossible demands for certain scenic effects, and as a result, the dramatic power of the final scene suffered. As the critic for the *Boston Traveller* described:

> Some young men were seen at the back of the stage carrying, at stated intervals, quite large pieces of wood; but they ceased passing too early, to have constructed, even out of sight, a respectable pyre. Brünnhilde, instead of leaping into the flames, walked dignifiedly out of sight in the direction wither Siegfried’s body had been borne. Hagen attempted to live up to the requirements of the scene, and did leap, but no one knows whether or not the Rhine-daughters caught him. There was an apotheosis showing in an oval frame the denizens of Walhall in very comfortable attitudes, who in a moment were covered by a screen upon which was reflected lurid gleams of light, the audience taking this to represent their sudden cremation.”

Ticknor pointed out similar faults, explaining that “Hagen scurried behind a rock by way of

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69 *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 21 Apr 1889, 1.
expressing death by drowning. Brünnhilde rushed holding a torch and leading her horse, and the last vision of Walhall reduced itself to a tableau vivant in the middle of the back scene.”

Despite the various inadequacies of the scenic effects and the stage settings of the Metropolitan’s touring Ring, many of the critics admitted that overall, the performances still gave a good outline of Wagner’s intentions. Because they were aware of the limitations each theatre imposed on the production, they were generous in their evaluations. As the reviewer of the Chicago Inter-Ocean observed, the smaller stage at the Chicago Opera House precluded any chance that the scenery originally intended for the Metropolitan Opera House would look as good there: “The magic fire scene did lack in the flash of sensationalism that makes the entrance of Siegfried a veritable hero tried by fire; the Nixie maidens basking in the Rhine imploring him to give back the ring, shared shallow artificiality, and the visions of Walhalla were too material to be attractive.” Still, he deemed the performances were adequate, for “Chicago is at present content to patronize them for their real worth and their meritorious presentation.”

Only the Boston Globe’s Ticknor was more skeptical; he thought the Metropolitan’s stage managers could have followed Wagner’s directions more closely. There is a certain irony, of course, in the way some American critics measured productions against a supposed Bayreuth ideal, since the 1876 Ring, for all its merits, was not entirely successful.

Musical Interpretation: Singers and Orchestra

Any weaknesses in the scenery and stage effects for the presentations of the Ring by Stanton’s company were felt by the critics to be somewhat atoned for by the strong performances of the singers and orchestra. Lilli Lehmann and Max Alvary, in particular, received near-unanimous praise for the portrayal of their parts. In Philadelphia and Boston, performing Sieglinde to her husband Paul Kalisch’s Siegmund in Die Walküre, Lehmann was commended by the North American for, “not only vitaliz[ing] the part with her own exuberant personality; she

70 Boston Globe, 6 Apr 1889, 4.
71 Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean, 28 Apr 1889, 13.
[also] animated it with a most human and womanly sentiment.\textsuperscript{72} The soprano had also assumed the role of Brünnhilde for presentations of \textit{Siegfried} and \textit{Götterdämmerung} on the entire tour, and of \textit{Die Walküre} in Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis. Excepting Ticknor’s comment in the \textit{Boston Globe} that he found her gestures monotonous in \textit{Götterdämmerung} (in his view, she basically had only two stage poses), and that her voice tended to overpower the orchestra in St. Louis, her vocal and histrionic abilities in the part of the Valkyrie received the greatest acclaim in most accounts.

Alvary’s portrayals of Loge in \textit{Das Rheingold} and the hero in \textit{Siegfried} were singled out as among the cast’s best performances. For Elson of the \textit{Advertiser}, the moment when Alvary appeared on stage as Loge was when the “true spirit of the great work began to reveal itself.” Not only did the tenor dominate as the “true scheming god” but the orchestra appeared to have been invigorated by his stage presence, and thus played the “fire music” brilliantly. Ticknor of the \textit{Globe} appreciated Alvary’s “keen, intelligent performance”, and was pleased to see that the tenor had adjusted his interpretation to a more tempered version: “[He was] so quaint and striking in his orange tunic and scarlet cloak with black and gold ornament and its bushy reddish hair.... [and] has toned down somewhat the excitability and recklessness which were at first too prominent in his impersonation.”\textsuperscript{73} The \textit{Chicago Tribune}’s critic also praised the tenor for his excellent enunciation and his effective physical characterization of the demi-god: “Max Alvary gave a really remarkable impersonation of the role of Loge. Every look, action, and gesture was calculated to keep before the mind Loge’s restless and deceitful nature.”\textsuperscript{74} In \textit{Siegfried}, the more detailed reviews commended Alvary on his complete embodiment of the role of the hero. His performance clearly inspired this emotion-filled depiction from Ticknor of the \textit{Boston Globe}:

The very spirit of the part seems to possess him, and rises by even and easy gradations from the careless, buoyant strength of the youth who appears driving his captured bear, pettishly breaks across the knee the insufficient weapons Mime has been forging, and

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{The North American}, 28 Mar 1889, col. B.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Boston Globe}, 4 Apr 1889, 2.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, 23 Apr 1889, 1.
laughs and mimics the irritated dwarf, up to the splendid and ardent passion of the last scene. There are tenderness and reflection in the moments when he learns the story of his early years and sits brooding in the wood after the slaying of the dragon; there is a noble and auspicious freedom in his vigorous forging of the sword, a great contempt when he derides the thought of fear or hears Mime’s treacherous proffer of the poison, and there are a frank courage and nobility in his encountering of every obstacle.76

The Chicago Tribune’s critic found himself also drawn to Alary’s multi-dimensional interpretation of the character of Siegfried, particularly the way that the tenor showed the hero’s character development, in that, from the moment he slayed the dragon to his encounter with Brünhilde, one had the impression that he had clearly “left his careless, thoughtless boyhood behind him forever.”76

In Götterdämmerung, Paul Kalisch’s performances as the hero were regarded less highly. His casting in the touring company was in fact a point of bitter contention with Alary, who had sang both Siegfrieds during the Metropolitan’s regular season. The “scandal” was covered in the Milwaukee and Chicago papers, in which it was revealed that Lehmann had originally negotiated with Stanton that she would only sing on the tour if her husband could have the role of Siegfried in the final opera (he was already replacing Julius Perotti as Siegmund in Die Walküre). Alary, who was offered the part after Albert Niemann declined his participation in the tour, was understandably annoyed and requested a higher salary as appeasement. The situation came to a head in Chicago, when Alary made some pointed remarks about Kalisch’s abilities to the Chicago Tribune, while Lehmann and Kalisch were spending an extra day in Milwaukee with guests. When they arrived in the city, Lehmann saw Alary’s interview and, in defense of her husband, publicly took the manager to task in the lobby of the opera house.77 Alary, however, remained the favored Siegfried, and over time, it became clear that Kalisch could not quite match his rival’s acting skills, despite his smooth, lyrical voice, deemed to be the result of his Italian vocal training. While the North American found Kalisch’s Siegfried to be more

75 Boston Globe, 4 Apr 1889, 2.
76 Chicago Tribune, 25 Apr 1889, 5.
77 See the summary of the event in the “A War of Stars,” Milwaukee Sentinel, 25 Apr 1889, 7.
“virile and vigorous” than Alvary’s, the Boston Globe felt the former’s performance was too “angular, hard and formal in action, dry and fragmentary in delivery.” The Tribune also found Kalisch’s gestures rather “stiff and constrained most of the time” and even though he gave an excellent vocal performance in Siegfried’s death scene, his interpretation lacked heroic conviction and was judged as “rather conventional”, and not very natural.

Kalisch’s Siegmund, by comparison, was more ably performed and intelligently sung next to his wife’s Sieglinde; their chemistry was particularly strong in Boston, to the point that the audience was “aroused to a frenzy of enthusiasm seldom seen in [that city].” When Felicié Kaschowska assumed the part of the female Walsung on the western leg of the tour, she and Kalisch were quite good together, although sometimes prone to inconsistency and thereby considered unexceptional. They seemed at their best near the end of the tour, in St. Louis; as the Post-Dispatch’s critic had observed:

Herr Paul Kalisch…also scored a triumph and sang with exquisite taste the beautiful love song of the first act. His work throughout was of the best, and if at times lacking in dramatic power, this was forgotten in the clearness and trueness of his notes and his admirable enunciation. Fraulein Kaschowska as Sieglinde was at first disappointing but she warmed to her work and recovered from what seemed to be nervousness and sang with great intelligence and finish and showed that she possessed a powerful and sweet soprano voice.

Among the rest of the cast, Wilhelm Sedlmayer and Ludwig Mödlinger gave especially memorable performances as Mime and Alberich, respectively. The Milwaukee Sentinel reported that their Act II, Scene 3 dialogue was “impersonated with much success and their vocal efforts and physical contortions supplied material for much amusement.” Elson of the Boston Advertiser especially admired Sedlmayer’s characterization in the first Act of Siegfried. As he wrote in his review:

The character is so disagreeable and so constantly subordinate to the heroic leading part that one might easily overlook its difficulties and not recognized the mastery with

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79 Boston Daily Advertiser, 3 Apr 1889, 4.
80 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 8 May 1889, 9.
81 Milwaukee Sentinel, 19 Apr 1889, 2.
which they were conquered. The craftiness, the malignity, the cowardice, the vanity, the spiteful anger, the cupidity, the narrow ambition, the base glee and the cunning with of the dwarf were shown in voice, by play, emphasis and attitude most picturesquely and truthfully. 82

As part of his portrayal, Sedlmayer apparently assumed a “pinched voice” and the “cowering manner of the dwarf”, which was deemed “ingenious” by Ticknor of the Boston Globe. These vocal alterations did not disrupt the tenor’s enunciation, the clarity of which, along with Alvary’s, was admired in the Milwaukee Daily Journal. Indeed, the critic felt it was the clear diction of both Sedlmayer and Alvary that contributed greatly to the intensified interest of the audience (even among non-German-speaking members) in their extended dialogues in the opera’s first act.

The remaining singers were generally praised as well. Emil Fischer was felt to be excellent in his roles as Wotan, The Wanderer, and Hagen, his dark impersonation of the latter sufficiently chilling. Intonation problems appeared to have afflicted the Rhinedaughters (Sophie Traubmann, Félicie Kaschowska, and Hedwig Reil), the Woodbird (Sophie Traubmann) and Fafner (Eugene Weiss) only in Boston but apparently nowhere else. Louise Meisslinger’s Fricka and Alois Grienauer’s Gunther were well-played, and Anna Marie Baumann-Trilof held her own as Brünnhilde in Die Walküre for the Philadelphia and Boston cycles. The Valkyries were powerful and impressive and the Gibichung chorus, vigorous and energetic. The entire cast of artists was considered a strong ensemble. Overall, the critics were in agreement that the audiences of Philadelphia, Boston, Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis had heard and seen Wagnerian singing of uncommon excellence by the Metropolitan’s German opera company.

By all accounts, Seidl’s sixty-piece orchestra reportedly played exceptionally well under his direction for the touring performances. Adjectives such as “brilliant”, “superb”, “very finished”, and “magnificent” appeared in several reviews; only very occasionally was there the odd report of bad intonation, such as the bungled horn call in the Chicago Siegfried. Seidl was continually

82 Boston Daily Advertiser, 4 Apr 1889, 4.
praised for his sensitivity to the acoustics of the various theatres, as he ensured that the orchestra’s volume never overwhelmed the singers. If there was any criticism given about the ensemble, it was that it was not full enough. Elson of the *Boston Advertiser* thought there needed to be more strings (especially basses) to balance out the brass section. Ticknor of the *Boston Globe* thought both string and brass sections needed to be expanded, particularly for certain parts of *Siegfried*. The music for the *Waldweben* scene, for example, could have been delivered more lushly, as it was when the Boston Symphony Orchestra had performed the excerpt in concerts. (It was likely that Stanton’s touring orchestra did not have enough musicians to fill out the string parts which are in *divisi* for this scene.) In Chicago, the *Inter-Ocean*’s reviewer thought the orchestra’s “Ride of the Valkyries” was “inadequate to the fullest and finest interpretation of Wagner’s sumptuous scorings”, compared to the sonorous and energetic renditions of Theodore Thomas and his orchestra. More remarkable is that many critics did not believe the “sunken pit” of the *Festspielhaus* should be adopted in their city’s theatres. In the opinion of the *Sentinel*’s writer, such a position would significantly dampen the volume of the strings, even if the horns were made less harsh. Others favored the intimacy of the exposed orchestra, as Ticknor of the *Boston Globe* did, along with the relatively close proximity of the audience to the stage as in the Boston Theatre’s design. None of the journalists found the visible orchestra a disruption to the “illusion” being created on stage. One wonders though, if they would have felt differently concerning the placement and exposure of the ensemble if Stanton’s orchestra had, in fact, been double its size, equal to the forces Wagner employed for the first presentation of the *Ring* cycle in 1876.

*American Audiences*

Critics in each city of the American *Ring* tour commented on the size of the audiences that attended the performances, as well as the level of interest and attentiveness. In general, it was observed that the number of Americans present was quite large and were enthusiastic,
owing in part to the exceptional nature of a presentation of the complete cycle in their cities. Many of the journalists boasted about the quality of the attendees and their general responses, describing them as: in Philadelphia, “a large and intelligent audience” followed the performance “with deep interest and pleasure”; in Boston, the “vast audience...[was] typical of the best intelligence and musical culture of the city and suburbs”; in Milwaukee, the “large and enthusiastic audience” was composed of the “very best people in the city”; in Chicago, the audience represented “a striking combination of fashionable society and the element typical of the best intelligence and musical culture of the city”; and in St. Louis, “last night’s performance was a rare satisfaction and the large audience testified by its close attention.” They also observed the attendance of society and the “fashionable set” at the performances. For opening night in Boston, a special telegram sent to the Chicago Inter-Ocean described that an audience of “wealth, aristocracy and culture” were present, demonstrated by the unusually long row of carriages that were in front of the Boston Theatre. The Tribune and the Inter-Ocean published the names of affluent patrons who were at the Chicago performances, which included the likes of Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Wacker, a second-generation German-American businessman and philanthropist, after whom Wacker Drive was named, and Mr. and Mrs. Potter Palmer, the well-known developer of State Street who built the Palmer House Hotel. In sum, it appears that the American audiences who saw the Metropolitan’s touring Ring were comprised predominantly of the wealthy elite, intelligentsia, and the educated middle classes of each city.

The cost of tickets was inexpensive enough that a significant number of the less affluent public could attend the performances. Individual tickets were slightly below than what was charged in New York, and were certainly much cheaper than the cost of tickets to performances in Bayreuth. In the breakdown of ticket price levels recorded in the Boston Theatre’s box office receipts, the orchestra section and the gallery, to which tickets per performance were the highest priced at $3.00 and the lowest priced at $0.50, respectively, contained the most
patrons. Depending on the city in which the company was performing the cycle, Americans came in from surrounding cities, thus creating something of a “Bayreuth Festival effect”. According to the *Inter-Ocean*, tickets for the Chicago *Ring* were purchased by “pilgrims” from Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Dubuque, Jackson and Kansas.

Still, critics reported that the auditoriums of theatres were not completely filled to capacity for the *Ring* performances, as the Metropolitan apparently had been in New York. In the performance of *Siegfried* in Philadelphia, the *North American* noted that “every part of the house except the amphitheatre was crowded.” The Boston Theatre’s box office receipts show audience totals that ranged from 1,500 to 2,800, well under the theatre’s maximum capacity of around 3,100. The managers of St. Louis’s huge Music Hall tried to boost attendance to *Götterdämmerung* by offering seats in the dress circle and balcony at the reduced prices of $1 and 75 cents, respectively. The size of the audience also varied according to which opera from the *Ring* was performed. In all cities, *Siegfried* had the highest attendance, followed by *Die Walküre* or *Götterdämmerung*; *Das Rheingold*, by comparison, had the lowest numbers. This pattern was clearly evident in the Boston Theatre’s record of box office receipts. For the first of the two cycles (April 1, 2, 3, and 5), 2,021 attended *Das Rheingold* (for a total revenue of $3,411.00); 2,015 for *Die Walküre* ($3,544.00); 2,485 for *Siegfried* ($4,444.50), and 2,102 for *Götterdämmerung* ($3,800.50). The second cycle (April 9, 10, 11 and 12) had much smaller audiences for *Rheingold* (933), *Die Walküre* (1,441), and *Götterdämmerung* (1,742), but *Siegfried* had the largest of the entire season at 2,828 attendees. The receipts from this presentation totaled $4,833.50, which made it the highest grossing performance of the entire tour in Boston. Similarly, in Milwaukee, the *Sentinel* reported that *Siegfried* generated the best financial results of the four nights in which the cycle was given.

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83 Box office receipts exist for all performances that occurred at the Boston Theatre between 1864 and 1901, and are contained in bound volumes held in the Theatre Collection at Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS THR 520).

84 *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, 20 Apr 1889, col. D.
Several conclusions can be drawn from this information. It is clear by the varying numbers for each performance that not all who attended the *Ring* saw the entire cycle. Only those who subscribed to the entire season may have done so, but otherwise, everyone else purchased single tickets, which likely contributed to the variation in attendance numbers (unfortunately, extant records such as the Boston Theatre's receipts cannot shed further light on the issue because the number of subscribers was not recorded.) While this behavior may not be especially surprising or unique to the circumstance, it is remarkable that *Siegfried* was so obviously more popular than the other *Ring* operas. Americans may have been drawn to see the popular tenor, Max Alvary, but he could not have been the sole reason since he also performed as Loge in *Das Rheingold*, the opera with the lowest attendance numbers. The critics found the music and dramatic plot of *Siegfried* the most attractive of the *Ring* operas; compared to the other three works, it was the brightest and most buoyant, not burdened by the dark forces of the ring as in *Die Walküre*, and later in *Götterdämmerung*. According to the *North American*, “it may be assumed that the listeners did not find the music dull or that they were willing to be bored at intervals by didactic declamation.” Elson of the *Boston Advertiser* surmised that *Siegfried* had all the elements that met Wagner’s ideal of a great music drama, including a true romance. The instance of the “first kiss” in the final scene proved to be so powerful in St. Louis that the critic of the *Post-Dispatch* spent a substantial portion of his review describing the climactic moment. It appeared that Americans identified with the character of Siegfried and his context. The St. Louis journalist found the opera appealing for its “simplicity, rusticity, the strong bond of sympathy between the forces and manifestations of nature and the wild, free heart of man in his primitive state seemed embodied in it.” In the sense of the latter, perhaps Siegfried did seem American, for as Joseph Horowitz has argued: “his high spirits, his physical strength, his instinctive intelligence—he understands the Forest Bird and befriends the bear—evoked the Frontier.”

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85 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 9 May 1889, 9.
This mixture of fairy-tale atmosphere, comedy, and nature and forest scenes in *Siegfried* obviously resonated well with the American audiences.

By all accounts, the American audiences of the Stanton company’s touring *Ring* appeared genuinely curious, attentive, and engrossed in the performances, though not yet entirely versed in Wagnerian etiquette. They were prone to interruptive displays of applause, (a “vulgar habit”, as Elson called it) that tended to mar the continuity of certain scenes; in Boston, Alvary’s fine portrayal of Loge provoked two bouts of clapping during the demi-god’s monologue. Much advantage was taken of the intermissions between acts to call the artists out. However, such behavior was pardonable in light of their evident enthusiasm. In the end, it was felt that even if not everyone was a true “Wagner enthusiast”, the audiences reportedly demonstrated a general disposition of “seriousness” in their early experiences of mature Wagnerian music drama.

*Other Themes of Critical Discussion*

As with the critics who reviewed the New York performances of the *Ring* operas, the reporters who saw the Stanton company’s presentations in Philadelphia, Boston, Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis sought to convey how the production fared in each of their cities. As we have seen is typical of this form of journalism, they evaluated the quality of the scenery and the scenic effects, the performances of the individual singers and the orchestra, as well as the responses of the audiences. Yet, their articles contained more than just knee-jerk reactions to these early American performances of the *Ring*. Insofar as the limitations of the newspaper column would allow them, these critics considered more deeply aesthetic issues concerning the *Ring* dramas and how might American audiences respond to them.

In general, the journalists imparted strikingly similar views on the *Ring* cycle as their New York counterparts. For one, they too interpreted the epic drama as a morality tale, with self-
sacrificial love as salvation from the devastating consequences of selfish materialism and the quest for power. As the writer for the Chicago Inter-Ocean described it for his readers, the Ring, …portrays the pernicious power of the lust for gold and the eventual redemption of humanity from its curse through the saving grace of love. The intemperate thirst for gold and its attendant power may be construed as the synonym for selfishness, its eventual outcome sorrow, disappointment, and death; its only remedy self-abnegation, born of the all-potent power of exalted love. 87

The critics also tended to consider each opera of the cycle as a separate entity, rather than viewing them as parts of a whole work, an attitude that they did not see as unusual. This was evident in the way they evaluated and compared the operas to each other. Perhaps the journalists’ assumption was that because the Ring was such a large-scale production, performances of the complete cycle would be rare events, whereas presentations of the individual operas would be more the norm. As in New York, these American critics emphasized the “human interest” value of the operas as an important quality in their aesthetic evaluation of them (though why exactly this perspective seems so persistent at the time is a topic requiring further investigation outside the scope of this dissertation). With its mythic setting, Das Rheingold, as a result, was deemed the least favorite work of the cycle. Notably, Elson of the Boston Daily Advertiser felt this opera would never be as popular as the others because audiences cannot sympathize with such supernatural figures as gods, even though their behavior appears human. The Chicago Tribune critic agreed with Elson, stating that the fantastical beings of Das Rheingold were “so unreal that their actions must of necessity lack the element of human interest possessed by the doings of human characters, however mythical those latter may be.” He also thought that Wagner’s music was less inspired in this opera, although he admitted that since it was supposed to be the prologue to the entire cycle, it had the necessary function of introducing many of the motives that would undergo development in the other operas.

87 Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean, 21 Apr 1889, 12.
By comparison, *Die Walküre* was felt to be more accessible and able to arouse greater emotional response from audiences because of the human story between Siegmund and Sieglinde (if one can banish the idea that the hero and heroine are brother and sister, said Elson). On the other hand, because of the generally dark and foreboding mood that pervades the opera, it was not as appealing as *Siegfried*, which has more “brightness”. The *Tribune’s* writer believed it was for this reason that Chicago audiences preferred the third opera of the cycle over all the others. Critics also thought that *Siegfried* best exemplified Wagner’s aesthetic theories of *Gesamtkunstwerk*; this perception was perhaps aided by the fact that the performances of this opera were the most even and consistent. But it was *Götterdämmerung* that the majority of critics deemed the best opera from the cycle, since its dramatic plot contained the most “human interest”. As Ticknor of the *Boston Globe* wrote,

> there is a deeper and more sympathetic feeling in this work because the action comes closer to humanity, for the gods have withdrawn, to have been succeeded by beings who, in spite of the infusion of some different blood in their veins, are still mostly like mortals in their passions and their demeanor.

The critic of the *North American* shared a similar view, commenting that,

> There is more human interest in *Götterdämmerung* than in any one of its companion works and it is correspondingly more impressive and enjoyable than they; its situations are such as arouse both the curiosity and sympathy of the spectator, and most of its characters are frankly and satisfactorily human.88

Ticknor and the reviewer for the *Milwaukee Sentinel* also found the final opera of the cycle to be the most dramatically interesting, with its “natural and strong” situations. Musically, it was also considered to be the most impressive, particularly in the way Wagner developed and integrated the motives from the preceding three operas. In this vein, the journalists regarded Wagner as a worthy heir of the venerated Austro-German tradition of orchestral music. Notably, the *Sentinel’s* critic thought Siegfried’s funeral march alone was “worthy of being named with similar works of Beethoven,” in the way the composer had “ingeniously” interwoven motives representing aspects of Siegfried’s life.

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88 *The North American*, 30 Mar 1889, col. B.
Above all, in the view of these music journalists, the performance of the *Ring* cycle in their respective cities signaled an important shift in the artistic and social function of opera: from “opera as entertainment” to “opera as a serious, intellectual activity.” Indeed, perhaps more so than their New York counterparts, the majority of the critics who evaluated the touring performances of the *Ring* overwhelmingly emphasized the intellectual significance of the cycle. Consider these statements from the various papers:

There is no denying that the Wagnerian music-dramas require an exercise of most patient intellectuality, than anything else in the modern musical repertoire, hence some understanding of the works is an almost absolute necessity for their genuine enjoyment. – *Chicago Tribune*

To thoroughly enjoy the Wagner advanced operas requires not only the use of ears and eyes, but a strong application of the intellectual faculties and a keen musical sense, combined with considerable training in the works of the best composers. – *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Wagner has brought back the intellectuality which had partially vanished from the art, but in a different manner. Intellectuality and emotion are united in a newer and more significant manner. – *Boston Daily Advertiser*

To catch these [motives] and appreciate their full significance is an intellectual task of such magnitude as to place these dramas among the most original and important contributions to the intellectual life of this century. It is from this serious standpoint that these great works ought to be considered; not from the ordinary one in which opera is looked on as an amusement. – *Milwaukee Daily Journal*

Such comments further confirm that the American appropriation of Wagner opera during the Gilded Age was for the aims of self-cultivation and uplift, as Joseph Horowitz has argued in *Wagner Nights*.

The key contributing factor to this perspective was the journalists’ acceptance and appropriation in their critical discourse of Hans von Wolzogen’s method of analyzing the music of the *Ring* cycle according to its “leitmotivs”. The critic for the *Milwaukee Sentinel* evidently used Wolzogen’s guide to describe some of the work’s “ninety motives” in his reviews. The Chicago journalists focused on how the motives were interwoven in *Götterdämmerung*, and discussed how this testified to Wagner’s genius. Louis C. Elson employed extensive motivic analysis in his articles for the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, which was in keeping with his training as
a music theorist. Of this group of critics, he seemed the most knowledgeable of the score (or at least he openly demonstrated that he was) since he tended to interpret details of the music in a manner that only a musically-trained person would fully understand. For example, on Brünnhilde’s betrayal in Götzterdämmerung, he wrote,

> What a glorification of secondary seventh chords it is! These dissonances have been managed by the master to express the deepest yearning, and the muted horns (the most villainous sound producible by the orchestra) from this part on, came frequently to the front with their expressive cacophony.\(^8^9\)

> Whatever the extent of technical analysis employed in their reviews, these critics did not hesitate to advise their readers that the study of the musical motives of the Ring would much enhance enjoyment of the dramas. The writer for the Milwaukee Daily Journal stated that any monotony experienced in the dialogue-heavy parts of Die Walküre would be lessened with better knowledge of the music. A work as significant as the Ring, moreover, demanded repeated listening. As he wrote,

> It is quite possible, however, that a more complete familiarity with the numerous leading motives and a fuller comprehension of what goes on in the orchestra would remove, wholly or in part, the sense of slowness in the action. There is much reason to think so. So great a work as this must be heard and studied and heard again, over and over and over, to be adequately estimated and enjoyed.\(^9^0\)

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch’s critic also strongly felt that genuine appreciation of Wagner’s works required study, in order “to get behind what appears to an uninitiated listener and spectator to be the clap-trap of dramatic effect in the scenery and orchestration.” Yet some critics were concerned that too much focus on learning the various meanings of the motives could lead to an over-intellectualization of the experience of the operas. The North American’s journalist had the impression that the Philadelphian audience had prepared themselves for the performances by conscientiously reading Wagner’s theories and studying the Ring’s motives to excess, so that some appeared overwhelmed during the performances. As he commented:

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89 Boston Daily Advertiser, 6 Apr 1889, 4.
90 Milwaukee Daily Journal, 18 Apr 1889, 1.
Wagner’s music like Shakespeare’s text has been complicated and obscured and made to appear formidable by a superabundance of criticism and commentary, and if it had not been insisted upon with so much strenuousness that there is such an immense deal of meaning in it which every self-respecting listener is bound to extract, it would be approached with less trepidation and heard with more enjoyment.\footnote{The North American, 27 Mar 1889, col. B.}

Even though knowing the motives could help one comprehend the operas more deeply, the critic advised “it is not wise to be so constantly and steadily on the watch for these motives as to have no thought for anything else.” A general acquaintance with the libretto and music by simply having seen a performance of a \textit{Ring} opera was enough to increase the enjoyment of a repeat presentation. He noted, for example, that the audience for \textit{Die Walküre} showed much more enthusiasm than for \textit{Das Rheingold}, because of their familiarity with the opera from past stagings. Yet, even if one had never experienced the cycle’s operas before, Elson reassured his Boston readers that there was still much about the works that one would find immediately appealing. Concerning \textit{Die Walküre}, he wrote that the “Ride of the Valkyries” and “Sieg mund’s love song” could still be enjoyed for their more “melodic and graphic” nature, as well as the “Fire-Charm” scene at the end of the opera which “can interest and delight even those who are entirely innocent of comprehension of Wagner's meanings.” Therefore this opera, he concluded, can “appeal to the laity as well as to the initiated.”\footnote{Boston Daily Advertiser, 3 Apr 1889, 4.}

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Between 1885 and 1891, the first performances of the \textit{Ring} operas, as well as the complete cycle, by the German companies of New York’s Metropolitan Opera House served to initiate American audiences to Wagner’s epic cycle. In essence, they were the fulfillment of plans originally discussed between Wagner and Angelo Neumann before the composer’s death; incidentally, the latter made one final tour with the Traveling Wagner Theatre to present the first \textit{Ring} in Russia in 1889, the same year the full cycle also premiered in the U.S. As in Bayreuth and elsewhere, the goal to realize the vision and demands that Wagner had outlined for its ideal
performance at the Metropolitan Opera and other American theatres proved challenging to scenic designers, machinists, stage managers, singers, and musicians alike. However, by most critical accounts, the quality of the staging and the musical interpretation of these presentations were achieved credibly and satisfactorily, even if not perfectly. Much of their success had to do with the Metropolitan’s importation of some of the foremost Wagnerian interpreters from Germany for the main roles, including some who were veterans of Bayreuth and had worked directly with the composer himself. Most importantly, the company and orchestra had the benefit of being directed by the Wagner’s chief protégé, Anton Seidl. In turn, American audiences received the performances with exceptional interest, attentiveness, and enthusiasm.

Beyond just recording for posterity how the performances of the *Ring* operas fared, American critics also played a significant role in shaping opinions—along with performers and devotees of Wagner—about the cycle. Although aspects of Wagnerian music-drama were already familiar to many Americans, the *Ring*, as a mature exemplification of the composer’s theories, still stretched audiences’ expectations and conceptions about the operatic genre. These critics therefore sought to initiate and nurture Americans’ appreciation of the cycle by advocating concerted study of its poetic text and musical motives in their reviews. Some of them even gave lecture-recitals about the *Ring* themselves. By engaging with the dramas in this way, along with repeated attendance at the opera house, they believed Americans would deepen their understanding and enhance their enjoyment of Wagner. Above all, they sought to expand to audiences for the *Ring* because they were convinced it unequivocally demonstrated Wagner’s progressive genius and cemented his significance in history. As in the view of the *Chicago Tribune’s* critic,

> It is clear to the world that in his “Nibelungen” Wagner has given to the world a practically new form of art. And if there are those who prefer the old one there is no reason why the existence of the new form should not be acknowledged as an accomplished fact. As to its worth there will naturally be a diversity of opinion, yet, though blemishes may be found in the treatment, judged even from Wagner’s avowed
aim, it may be borne in the mind that the majority of the world’s brightest musical intellects agree to admiration of these productions of his genius.\footnote{Chicago Daily Tribune, 28 Apr 1889, 36.}

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The following decade marked another phase for the American performance and reception of the \textit{Ring}. The Metropolitan Opera House was affected by several radical changes, including the sudden cessation of producing German-language opera from the repertory, and a fire that destroyed much of the theatre’s stage and auditorium along with the records, scenery and props for the productions from the German seasons. As a result, the burden of staging Wagner’s operas, including the \textit{Ring} during this period was undertaken by Walter Damrosch, free at last from the shadow of Seidl, who was pursuing other activities in New York and Brooklyn. By 1899, however, the Metropolitan had reinstated the German repertoire, and the first uncut \textit{Ring} was given that year, though unfortunately without Seidl, who passed away the previous year. Americans also continued to make the pilgrimage to Bayreuth, and a significant number from all over the United States traveled to the 1896 Festival, which featured the \textit{Ring} for the first time since its world premiere.
“At last the lights are lowered as a gentle hint to the enthusiasts, the audience slowly disperses, and an event in the history of music in America has come to an end, with everyone agreed that musically, dramatically, and scenically, the “Nibelung” Cycle has made a profound impression.”

--Gustav Kobbé, 1899

During the German seasons at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York was gradually established as the primary American hub for staged performances of Wagner’s operas, including the Ring. While the visual presentation of the cycle’s operas was not always adequate, the American press reports indicated that the musical performances by Anton Seidl, the orchestra, and the German singers cast in the main roles were mostly excellent. In general, Americans comprised mostly of the middle and upper classes as well as sizeable groups of women, were observed as exhibiting a strong interest in these stagings, and many times over, filled and refilled large theatres, sometimes to capacity. Ultimately, the first American performances of the complete Ring cycle (albeit in a truncated version) in New York and on tour, helped to bring about the coming-of-age of American operatic high culture, which was gradually assimilating as its own German opera, and notably, Wagner opera, through the advocacy of German artists and American music critics. In the view of the latter, Americans’ developing tastes for Wagner’s opera in cities throughout the country was indicative of their cultural development.

This chapter examines the American performance and reception of Der Ring des Nibelungen within the changing socio-cultural landscape of opera production in the U.S. during the fin-de-siècle. At the Metropolitan Opera, stockholders and directors voted for the abrupt cessation of the performance of opera in the German language, and for the first time since the opening season of the theatre, returned to presenting predominantly French and Italian repertory. Meanwhile, Walter Damrosch, who had found himself edged out by Seidl during the

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German seasons, saw an opportunity to bring back Wagner’s operas on his own terms, and to capitalize on a market still eager to see the composer’s works on stage. He formed his own eponymous company in 1894 and for the next five years, through touring, they introduced more Americans to staged presentations of Wagner’s operas than any other troupe before.

Yet, despite the reach and popularity of Damrosch’s company, its director soon found it challenging to make producing only German-language operas financially viable. Henry Abbey and Maurice Grau, who were then managing the resident company at the Metropolitan, also struggled to make entire seasons of solely French and Italian operas attractive to Americans. Both troupes eventually came to develop the “wing” system, in which French, Italian, and German operas were equally represented in a single season, performed by singers and conductors who specialized in their respective languages and operatic traditions. Through this scheme, the Ring cycle became part of the core operatic repertory at the Metropolitan Opera, during Maurice Grau’s tenure there between 1898 and 1903. This period also included the first uncut performances of the complete cycle in the U.S.

Part I: The Damrosch Grand Opera Company and the Ring, 1894–1899

The Politics of German/Wagner Opera Production in New York

During the German seasons, the stockholders at the Metropolitan Opera House had helped to make the business of producing opera somewhat less financially risky, by agreeing to pay off the deficit incurred by the resident company during each season. ² Even with this safety net, Edmund Stanton nevertheless had to ensure that his company remained commercially viable. Seasonal deficits were an inevitable part of presenting opera, especially when Wagner operas were involved since they required considerable monetary resources. Financial success, then, for Stanton was less about making a profit than it was to keep his company’s operational

² This is what Paul DiMaggio has described as the “guarantee model” of opera production in his essay, “Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Cultural Model to Theater, Opera, and Dance, 1900 –1940,” in Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality, ed. Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 21–57.
debt to a minimum so that stockholders would not have to absorb too large of a loss. Fortunately for Stanton, the German seasons under his management were lucrative; for instance, the deficit for the 1888–1889 season, which included the entire Ring, came to just under $600. Therefore, when the directors and stockholders of the Metropolitan announced the German opera seasons would end in the spring of 1891, their decision seemed a strange one. Already for the 1889–1890 and 1890–1891 seasons, they had forced Stanton to diminish the number of performances of Wagner’s works which had resulted in a “disastrous decline in box-office receipts and increased deficit.” Nevertheless the directors held fast to their general opinion that many of their patrons were now over-satiated with German-language opera, but specifically Wagner opera. As further justification for a change, the stockholders pointed out that the German seasons, though well attended, resulted in a general increase in each stockholder’s yearly assessment and would continue this way unless the balance of repertory, in their view, shifted to include more Italian and French works. Ultimately, it appears their decision to drastically curb the amount of German opera performed at the Metropolitan Opera House was driven by their own predilections, for they did not favor the “heavier” Wagner operas, such as Tristan und Isolde and the Ring.

The new “regime” began with the 1891–1892 season, for which the directors re-hired Henry E. Abbey, the impresario from the very first Metropolitan season, along with John Schoeffel and Maurice Grau, to be joint managers of the new company. The roster included a few famous names from the German seasons, including Lilli Lehmann, as well as soon-to-be-popular newcomers, the brothers Jean and Edouard de Reske, and the American sopranos Emma Eames and Lillian Nordica; the Italian Augusto Vianesi was the primary conductor. Sixty-six performances of twenty-six different operas were given, among which only certain works by

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3 New York Times, 22 Mar 1891, 12. According to this article, the expenditures for the 1888–1889 season amounted to $478,000, and the deficit came to $582.00.
Wagner were given, including Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Der fliegende Holländer (for which Anton Seidl returned to conduct four performances), and Die Meistersinger. All of these received significantly fewer presentations than in the German seasons and were given in Italian translation. The Ring operas were conspicuously absent; they would not be seen again on the Metropolitan’s stage until 1894.

In March 1889, news of the success of the first American performances of the Ring cycle must have reached European shores. Coincidentally, Angelo Neumann had reassembled his “traveling Wagner theatre” around this time to bring the Ring to Russia, where his company gave four complete cycles in St. Petersburg, and one in Moscow.5 According to his memoir, Neumann seemed to have resigned himself to the possibility that he would never be able to bring his troupe to the United States, as Wagner had wanted him to do, despite having received many invitations. Yet, despite his claim to have renounced all “far-reaching plans” after the Russian tour, there is evidence that he did make one attempt (perhaps his last) to find a way to cross the Atlantic. The Milwaukee Sentinel reported in October 1891 that Neumann had proposed that a “Bayreuth Festival” take place in Milwaukee, as an event to supplement the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In a letter to C.C. Rogers, the president of the Milwaukee Advancement Association, with whom he was corresponding about his proposal, Neumann outlined what appeared to be his most ambitious artistic and financial undertaking yet. The following extract was reprinted for the city’s local paper, the Sentinel:

I believe that there should be six performances every week, four in the evening and two matinees. The repertoire would be as follows: ‘Die Feen,’ ‘Rienzi,’ ‘The Flying Dutchman,’ ‘Tannhaeuser,’ ‘Lohengrin,’ ‘Die Meistersinger Von Nuernberg,’ ‘Tristan and Isolde,’ ‘Das Rheingold,’ ‘Die Walkuere,’ ‘Siegfried,’ and ‘Goetterdaemmerung.’ I have received the assurance from Bayreuth that I would be given the original stage settings, etc., for ‘Meistersinger,’ ‘Tristan,’ and ‘Tannhaeuser,’ those for ‘Parsifal’ I have been refused however.6

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6 The Sentinel, 9 Oct 1891, 3. Copyright protection established by the Berne Convention for the protection of Literary and Artistic Works ensured that Parsifal could only be performed in its entirety in Bayreuth during this time.
He also intended to import the soloists, the orchestra (including its leader), the ballet, and the stage manager and mechanics, directly from Bayreuth. As reported in the Chicago Tribune, costs for the entire endeavor were projected to be high, at nearly $1,000,000 total, but the American promoters were quite positive it would be feasible and even a “great financial success.” For the performances, a new Festspielhaus would be specially built, sponsored by the brothers August and Harry Uihlein of the Schlitz Brewing Company, providing that Schlitz Park was selected as the site.  

Unfortunately for Neumann, these plans never came to fruition, but the sheer ambitiousness of his project suggests something of the confidence he and his U.S. promoters had in Wagner’s music. Back in New York, however, the Metropolitan’s stockholders continued to cling stubbornly to their convictions to significantly curtail the performance of Wagner opera in their theatre. An unexpected turning point came on August 27, 1892, when a catastrophic fire swept through the house’s stage and auditorium, destroying them entirely, as well as the scenic collection stored underneath the stage. Unable to thereafter mount an opera season while the house underwent repairs, the stockholders decided to reorganize themselves and form a new corporation, the “Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company”. They subsequently entered a new lease agreement with Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau for the next five years, with each season consisting of thirteen weeks of opera. The first of these was similar to that of 1891–1892: Italian and French grand opera repertoire dominated the seventy total performances while Wagner’s

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7 Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 Oct 1891, 1. Neumann outlined the following projected expenses for his Festival: $300,000 for the salaries of the artists, chorus members and other employees; $30,000 for daily expenses; $50,000 for royalties to the heirs of Wagner; $50,000 for his salary as director of the company; $250,000 for the theater building; and a guarantee of $250,000, for a total of $930,000.

8 August and Henry Uihlein were German-American immigrants from Baden who settled in Milwaukee during the mid-nineteenth century. For a brief biography, see: http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=1636&term_type_id=1&term_type_text=people&letter=U. See also the following article, “Joseph Schlitz Brewing Co.: A Chronological History” by Michael R. Reilly at http://www.slahs.org/schlitz/history3.htm.

9 The 1892 fire was supposedly started by a workman’s cigarette dropped in the paint-room; see Eisler, The Metropolitan Opera: The First Twenty-Five Years, 1883–1885, and also Kolodin’s The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1935 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936). The new corporation consisted of thirty-five stockholders, who purchased the opera house’s holdings from the previous corporation, each subscribing $30,000. Among the changes made to the interior of the auditorium included the lowering of both the stage and the parquet floor by three feet, and the installation of electrical lighting throughout.
Tannhäuser, Die Meistersinger, and Lohengrin were limited to only nine stagings. Once again, Seidl was invited to lead the Wagner operas but as in the previous season they were performed in Italian translation. It was not long, however, before it became clear that there was still an American demand for stagings of Wagner’s other works, especially the operas of the Ring. A key figure who was instrumental in bringing them back into the performance repertory was Walter Damrosch (1862–1950).

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Walter Damrosch's association with the Metropolitan Opera formally began when he was only twenty-three years of age. While he had some training as a conductor, he was still inexperienced, and the Metropolitan's directors did not feel comfortable hiring him as a direct successor to his father Leopold. However, they recognized that he had potential, so they elected to retain him within the company, appointing him as assistant conductor to Seidl and assistant manager to Edmund Stanton. Seidl’s arrival at the Metropolitan, however, caused mixed feelings in Damrosch. On the one hand, he knew that Seidl’s talent and comprehensive knowledge of the Wagner repertoire far surpassed his own, and that next to Seidl, he would always be the subordinate conductor. On the other hand, his position as assistant conductor and assistant manager provided valuable opportunities. As Stanton’s assistant, Damrosch became familiar with how to manage an opera company, and among his duties accompanied the director on his yearly summer excursions to Europe to engage singers for the upcoming season (Seidl did not join them on these trips.) He also gained experience conducting opera productions of Italian and French works, although he wished for more. Seidl resolutely kept the Wagner repertory for himself, but Damrosch was able to absorb, to some extent, the works he longed to conduct by rehearsing singers in their roles. It was in such a circumstance that he

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10 According to his memoirs, Damrosch felt “great sorrow and anguish of heart” over this treatment by Seidl, even though he knew that Seidl was the “accredited and celebrated Wagner conductor.” As he elaborated: “[A] great part of my training had been in the modern operas. I almost knew the Wagner music-dramas by heart and had received a very thorough training in the symphonies of the classical composers, but for the operas of Meyerbeer and Verdi, I had youthful intolerance, and of their traditions of tempi and nuance I knew but little…” From Walter Damrosch, My Musical Life (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 64.
befriended the soprano Lilli Lehmann. As she recounted in her autobiography, Damrosch was immature, but talented and willing to learn:

There was often friction between Walter Damrosch and myself, --as, for instance, when he did not adhere, at the pianoforte rehearsal, to the piano score, but wandered off into variations, because three equal eighth notes seemed to him too tiresome…We were quite good friends, however, as I saw that he understood how to accept sound advice with humour, for Walter Damrosch was clever and knew what he was about.\(^{11}\)

Lehmann became a reliable advisor to the young conductor, helping him improve his technique, especially in his musical direction of singers.\(^ {12}\) Walter in turn was especially grateful for her guidance since Seidl kept his distance and made no overtures to mentor his assistant.

Over time, however, Walter recognized that if he was to go further as a conductor, he would need a proper musical education that would make him more competent. In the spring of 1887, he traveled to Frankfurt to seek Hans von Bülow’s instruction. At first, von Bülow hesitated to take him on, but soon warmed up to the young man and agreed to tutor him. On the same trip, Damrosch had a serendipitous encounter with the wealthy industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. Although Carnegie was serving on the board of directors of the New York Symphony when Leopold Damrosch was still conducting it, he had not met the elder Damrosch, or the son who later took over. Upon meeting the latter, he introduced himself and his new wife, who sang in the other organization Leopold had founded, the Oratorio Society. A year later, in 1888, the Carnegies invited Walter to stay with them at their summer home in Scotland. Also along on the trip was James Blaine, the U.S. Senator of Maine (and soon-to-be Republican Presidential candidate) with his wife and two daughters, one of whom would become Walter’s wife. For a month, Walter absorbed the intellectual aura cast by the two men; to repay the family for their generosity, he provided the evening’s entertainment. After dinner, sitting at the family’s Broadwood piano, Walter would give an hour-long talk on one of the Ring operas, or sometimes on just a single act from one, explaining the plot and playing its musical

\(^ {11}\) Lehmann, My Path Through Life, 344.
\(^ {12}\) See My Musical Life, 65.
themes. Later that fall, Damrosch extended these lecture-recitals and presented them to the New York public, to great acclaim. They became sufficiently popular that Damrosch continued to give them for many years to come. As George Martin argued, this was where Damrosch excelled Seidl: “[Walter] had many imitators, including Seidl, who played beautifully but needed a partner to speak. But two have not the ease of one, nor could Seidl, or anyone else, match Walter’s ability to create an informal atmosphere or to reproduce on the piano an orchestral score.” Thus, even though Seidl led the performances of the Ring operas during the Metropolitan’s 1888–1889 season, their reception was likely aided substantially by Walter’s grooming of American audiences for these works.

Following his idyllic summer abroad, Walter left his positions at the Metropolitan to focus on leading the New York Symphony and the Oratorio Society, as well as to give music lectures. As long as Seidl was there, he would have no chance to conduct the Wagner repertoire. But a few years after the end of the German seasons, the dearth of staged presentations of Wagner’s opera created an opportunity that Damrosch saw he could fill. In February 1894 Damrosch formed his own opera company and with the New York Symphony (which he already conducted), gave two benefit performances of Die Walküre at Carnegie Music Hall to raise money for the Workingmen’s School. While the Music Hall’s small stage hindered any chance of an adequate production (the Times critic described it as “a small, ill-made, ill-furnished, ill-lit stage, where the characters were crowded together”), and the space for the orchestra was too long and narrow for the musicians to sound cohesive, the presentations were described as still having “great earnestness of spirit.” These charitable performances would probably have been much less successful if not for the several well-known Wagner artists Damrosch hired, the same singers his father had employed for the Metropolitan premiere of Die Walküre in 1885. Among those who reprised their roles from nearly a decade ago were Amalie Materna as Brünnhilde,

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14 New York Times, 14 Feb 1894, 4; see also 18 Feb 1894, 16.
Emil Fischer as Wotan, and Anton Schott as Siegmund. Though time and age had rendered their voices somewhat past their prime, their characterizations were still found to be compelling. Perhaps what was most telling about the performances is that despite their inadequacies, the press reported that were attended by sizeable audiences.

Heartened by this first test to gauge American interest in the Ring operas, Damrosch rented the Metropolitan Opera House for three more benefit performances a month later, during the resident company’s post-season. This time, he added Götterdämmerung, the first time he would conduct the opera. One presentation each of Die Walküre and Götterdämmerung raised funds for the University Settlement Society and the New York Free Kindergarten Association, and another of Götterdämmerung for the Workingmen’s School. The cast and orchestra were the same, the latter apparently “excellent” under Damrosch’s leadership. The scenery and mechanical effects were simple but seemed to be an improvement from the Carnegie Hall production; the weapons and other properties were borrowed from the Metropolitan, according to Damrosch.15 Once again, considerable audiences were present at the performances, many, no doubt, encouraged by the cheaper ticket prices associated with German opera. Determined to go beyond New York, Damrosch subsequently took his company and orchestra to Philadelphia and Boston for additional charitable performances in early April. Philadelphians were thus treated to a “Wagner Festival” to aid unemployed men, and two performances of Die Walküre and Götterdämmerung reportedly attracted Americans from the neighboring cities of Washington D.C. and Baltimore. The critic of The North American unequivocally praised the productions, and noted the fashionable and “intelligently appreciative audience” who applauded with unconventional zeal.16 In Boston, things seemed to go much less smoothly, or perhaps Louis C. Elson’s reviews for the Daily Advertiser were more honest. According to him, there were many technological snafus (for example, the fire in Hunding’s hut kept going out and

15 Damrosch, My Musical Life, 105.
16 See The North American, 3 Apr 1894, 7, and 5 Apr 1894, 5.
relighting throughout Act I due to finicky gas jets) and the performance of *Götterdämmerung* entirely lacked the chorus of vassals, having been stranded in New Haven due to a severe storm. The operas were performed with liberal cuts, the orchestra was only half the size of the Bayreuth original, and Elson questioned Damrosch’s rather expansive interpretations of the “Ride of the Valkyries”, “Wotan’s Farewell”, and the “Magic Fire music.”\(^{17}\) Despite the uneven and incomplete quality of the productions, these performances reportedly drew “very large” audiences; it seemed Americans were hungering for staged presentations of the *Ring* operas, and, as Elson put it, were “relish[ing] them for their scarcity”. As he further observed: “It is so seldom that we have German opera, excepting the fragments to be enjoyed only through instrumental interpretation at the weekly Symphony concerts sometimes, that we should not grumble at shortcomings but be thankful for what…we get.”

Having now proven that Americans still desired to see Wagner’s *Ring* operas, the emboldened Damrosch approached Abbey at the Metropolitan to see if they might allow his company to appear on the house’s stage during the regular season. He proposed that for each week, one night (when the resident company was not performing) be reserved for his company to give German opera. Abbey refused this arrangement but having good relations with Damrosch, offered him eight weeks during the post-season, “on easy terms.”\(^{18}\) Not wanting to turn down an opportunity, Damrosch accepted and eagerly began seeking sponsors for his company; he and his wife Margaret even sold their house and used the proceeds to fund this ambitious project to bring Wagner’s operas back to the Metropolitan.

Meanwhile, news of the warm response to Damrosch’s benefit performances and his current attempt to restore Wagner’s later operas to the performing repertory in New York and other American cities had roused Anton Seidl. Prompted by the recent marginalization of his

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\(^{17}\) See *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 12 Apr 1894, 5, and 13 Apr 1894, 5.

\(^{18}\) Damrosch, *My Musical Life*, 106. According to Damrosch’s recollection, Abbey and Grau were supposedly open to his initial proposal but told him in the end that it was “financially foolish”. One cannot help wondering if this bit of counsel was legitimate advice given by two experienced impresarios to a young, ambitious, conductor, or a veiled excuse to prevent competition for audiences during the regular season.
role at the Metropolitan and perhaps the sense that Damrosch’s plans threatened to usurp his vaulted position as America’s “disciple of Wagner”, Seidl too began to organize his own season of German opera. To preempt any potential conflict between the two conductors, William Steinway, of the prominent German-American family of piano manufacturers, wrote to Damrosch promising his personal and financial backing of the company’s upcoming season, if, as a gesture of good will, Damrosch invited Seidl to participate. In a tense, joint meeting at New York’s Liederkranz Hall, Damrosch suggested that he and Seidl share an equal division of the conductorship of eight Wagner operas, which included the complete Ring cycle. Steinway thought the proposal was fair, but according to the New York Times negotiations came to a head when Seidl stated he would only agree to this arrangement if he conducted the Ring and Tristan und Isolde (the “meat” of the repertory, as the journalist put it). This would leave Damrosch with “the bones”: Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, Der fliegende Holländer, and Die Meistersinger. The latter was willing to comply insofar as he got to conduct Die Walküre, but Seidl refused. In the end, no combination of operas was satisfactory to either party. The following day, Seidl was reported to have told Steinway that he would not share the conducting of Wagner’s operas with anyone and “therefore, preferred not to have anything to do with the venture.” However, from Seidl’s perspective (as he told the New York Times), he bowed out on the account of Damrosch being more capable than he of managing an opera company, though he thought himself the artistically superior of the two. Nonetheless, Steinway seemed to have viewed Seidl’s retraction as a rebuff, and he ultimately directed his full support to Damrosch, in the form of a $2,500 check, “for which I will take subscription seats for your season in different

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20 Seidl’s feelings about Damrosch were reminiscent of earlier tensions between the two conductors during the late 1880s; see Joseph Horowitz, Wagner Nights: An American History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 101. According to Horowitz, “Seidl’s antipathy to Damrosch is sometimes traced to Damrosch’s decision, in 1886, to present the American concert premiere of Parsifal, a work Seidl considered his own.” Yet, the basis of Seidl’s antagonism was likely more deep-seated. Fundamentally, Seidl did not think highly of Damrosch’s abilities as a conductor of Wagner’s operas, and as a response, adopted a protectionist attitude toward the repertory. Whatever the younger conductor’s artistic shortcomings, however, Seidl could not deny Damrosch’s evident success and popularity with American audiences as a proponent of Wagner’s music.
parts of the house."\(^{21}\)

With Seidl’s withdrawal, Damrosch, now free to assume complete control of his enterprise, turned his full attention to building his company for the 1895 season. Following in his father’s footsteps, he travelled to Germany to recruit singers and a stage manager. He contracted a Viennese firm to design the scenery; for the Ring operas, copies of the 1876 Bayreuth set were made. Abbey and Grau also offered their support, by allowing Damrosch access to the Metropolitan’s available stock of costumes and properties. The New York Symphony was maintained as the company’s orchestra. To finance his venture, Damrosch drew on the support of the following he had acquired from his entertaining lecture-recitals on Wagner’s operas. To supplement his own investment and Steinway’s donation, he obtained the backing of a Wagner Society, formed by a number of New York socialites, and headed by his friends, Miss Mary R. Callendar and Miss Caroline de Forest.\(^{22}\) Through their rigorous activity and promotion, the company managed to secure a substantial number of subscribers well in advance of the beginning of the season. The directors of the Metropolitan Opera also generously offered to pay the $500 rental fee per night for the boxes. In sum, it appeared that the return of Wagner’s operas to the Metropolitan by way of Walter’s Damrosch’s company was going to be a surefire success.

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With the Metropolitan Opera’s company avoiding Wagner’s Ring operas entirely after the German seasons, the future of the cycle in the United States had initially seemed quite uncertain. Of course, any enterprising impresario might have wanted to fill the niche but may have found the operas prohibitively difficult and expensive to be mainstays in their company’s

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\(^{22}\) Little else is known on the life and activities of these two society women. Caroline de Forest was the cousin of Lockwood de Forest, an American artist who partnered with Louis Comfort Tiffany to establish the decorative arts design firm “Louis Tiffany and Associated American Artists.” In the early twentieth century, both women were active members of the Colony Club, the first social club in New York exclusively for women. See *New York Times*, 17 Apr 1908, 7.
repertory. Even the 1894 benefit performances of *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung* by Damrosch’s company were quite meager production-wise. Still, what Damrosch proved in this endeavor was that the American interest and demand for the *Ring* operas was still thriving and robust. In his mind, that demand needed to be met, and if no one else, he and his company would do it. To date, there has been yet to be an investigation into the American revival of Wagner’s *Ring* between 1895 and 1898 by Walter and the Damrosch Opera company. More curious is that historians of the Metropolitan Opera (notably, Gerald Fitzgerald et al of the *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera* and Paul Eisler’s study) have elected to exclude Damrosch’s company from the theatre’s history, even though the troupe performed there in 1895, 1897, and 1898. The following discussion seeks to show that in the second half of the 1890s, the Damrosch Opera Company was instrumental in spurring the return, and deeper assimilation, of the *Ring* dramas into the American operatic performing repertory. As contemporary newspaper reports reveal, the company helped to expand the American audience for the *Ring* operas, by touring with them to more U.S. cities than was achieved during the Met’s German seasons.

**The Walter Damrosch Opera Company and the Ring Operas, 1895–1899**

*The 1895 season*

The first all-Wagner season of the Damrosch Opera Company began on February 25, 1895, lasting for just over four weeks at the Metropolitan Opera, and followed by a multi-week

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23 Only George Martin has broadly examined the troupe’s activities during this period in Chapter 13 of his biography of the Damrosch family, *The Damrosch Dynasty*, 144–51. Walter Damrosch provided his own account in Chapter 10 of his autobiography, *My Musical Life*, 104–33.

24 Evidently, there was a distinction made between the “resident company” at the house (i.e. Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau) and a troupe who used the premises (i.e. the Damrosch Opera Company), even though both groups were technically renting the theatre from the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company; see Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1935*, 57–64. Fitzgerald and Eisler’s operational assumption that the “resident” troupe and the Real Estate Company were a single entity during this period thus seems somewhat of an oversimplification of actual historical situation.

25 As George Martin recommended, newspaper reports still offer the best documentation of the Damrosch Opera Company’s performances and their reception. Unfortunately, any administrative records of the company in the possession of the Damrosch family are longer extant; according to Paul Eisler, these were destroyed in a fire. For a basic overview of the company’s activities in the context of the New York Opera scene, see Chapter 18, “Uprising in Favor of German Opera”, in Henry Krehbiel’s *Chapters of Opera*, 127–40.
tour to Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Louisville, and Pittsburgh (see Appendix H). Out of twenty-one total performances in New York, nine were of the *Ring* operas, with four of *Siegfried*, two of *Götterdämmerung*, and three of *Die Walküre*. Judging by the schedule of performances, there was no evident attempt made to give the operas in the order of the cycle, save the “trilogy” of *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* on March 11 (Monday), 13 (Wednesday) and 15 (Friday). (The critic of the *New York Times* assumed *Das Rheingold* was left out because of “the expense attendant on its production and the improbability of repayment on the part of the public.”) According to an advertisement in the *New York Times*, single tickets ranged from $1 to $4, and $20 and $40 for boxes per performance, slightly lower than those of the Metropolitan’s resident company. Yielding to public desire for some performances at “popular” (i.e. lower) prices, Damrosch offered three operas, including *Die Walküre*, at nearly half the cost. Overall, the season appeared to be highly anticipated by critics as well as the general public.

To furnish his company, Damrosch sailed to Germany to engage experienced singers of Wagner opera (see Appendix I). For the *Ring* operas, some of his recruits were already familiar figures to American audiences from the Metropolitan’s German seasons: Emil Fischer reprised his roles as Wotan and Hagen; Max Alvary was both Siegfrieds and was cast as Siegmund also. Otherwise, most members of Damrosch’s company were making their American debuts: the acclaimed Wagner soprano Rosa Sucher was cast as Brünnhilde (for *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*); Franz Schwarz from Weimar played The Wanderer; Rudolph Oberhauser of

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26 All known performances of the *Ring* operas as determined by newspaper reviews are listed in the Appendix; the dates and operas the company performed in Kansas City, Louisville, and Pittsburgh are currently unknown without direct access to extant newspapers from these cities.

27 Of the remaining performances, *Tristan und Isolde* received three, *Lohengrin* four, *Tannhäuser* three, and *Die Meistersinger* two. The Damrosch company also gave two concert presentations of *Parsifal* at Carnegie Music Hall.


29 According to an advertisement in the *New York Times*, single tickets were substantially reduced to a range of 50 cents to $2.50; the grand-tier boxes cost $20; and the stall boxes were $10 and $12.

30 A detailed preview of the various singers of Damrosch’s company was provided in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Feb 1895, 37.
Berlin was Alberich (in *Siegfried*) and Gunther; and Conrad Behrens was Hunding and Fafner.\(^{31}\) The young up-and-coming German soprano, Johanna Gadski, sang Gutrune, and shared the part of Sieglinde with Elsa Kutscherra, who also sang Brünnhilde in the Chicago performance of *Siegfried*. Damrosch also hired several singers of non-German origin, including English soprano Marie Brema (née Minnie Fehrmann) for the role of Brünnhilde for the entire season’s performances of *Die Walküre* (apparently, much to Sucher’s chagrin). He had witnessed her as Kundry in the previous summer’s Bayreuth Festival, and wanted to train her to sing the Valkyrie’s part.\(^{32}\) Filling out the rest of the company were the Polish tenor Nicolaus Rothmühl, who divided Siegfried and Siegmund with Alvary, and the Rhinedaughters were taken up by three singers from New York: Marchella Lindh, Mina Schilling, and Marie Maurer.

To direct matters of staging, Damrosch had initially hired Adolph Bauman from the Royal Opera of Prague, but Bauman met an unfortunate end with the wreck of the steamship Elbe, en route to the United States.\(^{33}\) He was replaced by Gustav Harder, who, for the past two years, had been working with the Augustus Harris Company in London to help them with the staging of Wagner’s operas there. For the scenery of the *Ring* operas, Damrosch contracted the firm of Kautsky and Briosky in Vienna to create entirely new sets for the company, based on the original Bayreuth *Ring*. According to him, they were of exceptional quality:

>[Kautsky and Briosky] were at that time at the head of their profession, and such beautiful foliage as, for instance, in the forest scene of “Siegfried,” had never before been seen on an American stage. Our New York painters gathered around it in amazement when it had been unpacked and properly mounted and hung.\(^ {34}\)

To ensure the best possible reception of the complete illusion, the performances were given, as the *Times* critic had forewarned, “with the strictest regard for those observances which emanate

\(^{31}\) Sucher (1849–1927) established her career performing in Leipzig (where she met and married her husband, the conductor Joseph Sucher), Hamburg (to work with Bernard Pollini), London, and Berlin. She also sang in the several Bayreuth Festivals, notably, in 1886 as Isolde and Kundry, in 1888 as Eva, 1891 as Isolde and Venus, and 1894 as Kundry. In 1882, Wagner had heard her sing in London as Elsa in *Lohengrin*.

\(^{32}\) Brema (1856–1925) was the first English soprano to sing at Bayreuth.

\(^{33}\) Krehbiel, *Chapters of Opera*, 128.

from Bayreuth”, including the darkening of the house before each performance, and little
tolerance for undesignated interruptions by tardy patrons and applause.

The first season of the Damrosch Opera Company opened with Tristan und Isolde; the
Ring operas were subsequently introduced, out of order, beginning with Siegfried, and followed
by Götterdämmerung, and Die Walküre. While the performances were reportedly well attended,
New York critics had mixed reactions to the quality of the productions. Inconsistencies in the
staging and scenery revealed the recurring challenges of mounting the Ring. One major
problem of the Kautsky/Briosky scenery was that it was too small for the large stage at the
Metropolitan Opera. Since it was made abroad, it had not been cut for a specific stage, which
was perhaps how Damrosch desired it, for it would have to be adapted to other theatres for
touring purposes. Certain parts of the set also lacked the appropriate scale to create an
effective illusion in the large hall. The New York Times critic, for instance, noticed that “hardly
more than half the audience could see the dragon in the forest scene of Siegfried because the
opening of the cut-wood drop at the front was altogether too small.”35 The stage management
was especially uneven; critics remarked that the light effects were an improvement from those
of the Metropolitan’s German seasons but sometimes, confusion resulted. As one journalist
observed, “…[I]t would puzzle any one to tell what time of the day or night the stage manager
thought it was in the third act of “Die Walküre” when he turned on all his medium in succession,
turned them all off, tried a calcium light, and two different periods of darkness.”36 The biggest
complaints were directed to the third act of Götterdämmerung. The following lashing was given
by the Times reporter, quoted in full here because for a newspaper review, it contains an
uncommon level of detail on the staging of a Ring drama:

…[I]t seemed a pity that the River Rhine should appear to be not more than ten yards
wide and that the hero, Siegfried, should arrive in a punt poled by his spear. There was a
dispiriting wooliness, too, about the “grass mats” on the borders of the ever-present river
in the death scene and in the final scene. The Rhine maidens palpably walked in the

36 Ibid.
water, and their gyrations were less suggestive of nixies at sport than of Coney Island damsels taking the bath for health only. The rocks of the death scene were badly set, and the pinnacle, which interposed its jagged peak between Siegfried and the three mermaids, made it seem that the hero’s vocal method had really enabled him to drive his vice through a considerable portion of the Paleozoic era.

The management of the close of the death scene robbed that immortal episode of all its grandeur. The choristers had not been well instructed in the effective pictorial action of the scene. They did not know even enough to group themselves in front of the pier while the body was lifted to it. The march of the funeral procession was cut short. A blue mosquito bar was lowered, then a black one. Next the lights went out, and then the curtain fell. Thus more than half the funeral march was played without the action which should accompany it, but with a great clatter of scene setting.

Finally, the last tableau was ridiculously ineffective. The burning of Walhall and the silent destruction of the assembled gods was about as picturesque and imposing as a gathering of labor agitators around a bonfire.37

Evidently, the challenges of staging the final scene of the Ring had yet to be suitably resolved.

The musical aspects of the performances appeared to have somewhat made up for the inadequacies of the staging. Most of the singers were credited for their excellent acting of their respective roles. Rosa Sucher was less impressive in the role of Brünnhilde (in Siegfried and Götterdämmerung) than anticipated, but she made an outstanding Sieglinde in the March 20 performance of Die Walküre, her portrayal variously describe as “loving, passionate”, and “noble, majestic.”38 Max Alvary reached a landmark one-hundredth performance in the role of Siegfried. In their American debuts, Marie Brema in the role of the Valkyrie was quite admired, for her “intelligent, eloquent comprehension of the text”, and Paul Lange as Mime was described as “well-trained” in the Wagnerian manner. Nicholas Rothmühl’s rather stiff and angular Siegmund improved from presentation to presentation, with the softening of his gestures. The other singers were otherwise deemed “acceptable.”

Despite the singers’ relatively strong histrionic abilities, some critics desired more lyricism from their voices. This opinion was part of a larger discourse on good operatic singing style that was circulating in New York periodicals at the time.39 With French, Italian and German opera in more-or-less equal prominence at the Metropolitan this season, critics began to

37 New York Times, 10 Mar 1895, 3.
39 For example, see New York Times, 3 Mar 1895, 23.
advocate that the blending of the best aspects of the various national traditions would result in higher standards of opera performance overall. In their view, French and Italian opera would profit from greater naturalistic acting and dramatic force, whereas Wagnerian singers should not only be able to act, but to sing beautifully as well.\textsuperscript{40} It was felt also that the aural experience of Wagner’s later works such as the \textit{Ring} cycle would be much improved with the infusion of Italianate lyricism, as the \textit{Times} critic suggested in the case of \textit{Götterdämmerung}:

> An ideal performance of this marvelous work will never be given until the vocal art that is now associated with French and Italian opera is combined with the superb dramatic spirit and self-unconsciousness of the German stage. There is so much beautiful vocal music in “Die Götterdämmerung” that the drama will never be justly appreciated till this is perfectly sung.\textsuperscript{41}

Concerning the orchestra under Damrosch’s leadership, reports indicated they fared relatively well despite limited rehearsal time in the Metropolitan’s auditorium. The ensemble appeared to have struggled to adapt to the acoustics of the theatre: according to one critic, the strings “never attained the solidity and roundness of tone which ought to be conspicuous in the Wagner works”; the brass often sounded “rude and hoarse”; and the woodwinds, while tolerable, were often not in balance with the rest of the sections.\textsuperscript{42} Even so, as the season progressed, the orchestra demonstrated steady improvement, and the angular sound “gradually softened.” Part of the issue was Damrosch’s conducting; while he was an adequate conductor with a solid knowledge of the scores, he lacked the fluidity and flexibility of musical interpretation that was necessary to be an ideal Wagner conductor. In other words, he was no Seidl. Yet, he too learned to modify his technique so that by the end of the season, the orchestra approached something like the flexibility and buoyancy that Wagner’s music demanded.

Ultimately, the artistic shortcomings of these performances appeared to have done little

\textsuperscript{40} According to one critic, “[Wagnerian music drama] will benefit by the delivery of its perfectly singable music—once foolishly called unsingable—with the most beautiful vocal art. [French and Italian opera] will gain, from the importation into its performances of German traditions as to action, groupings, and general stage management, the dramatic illusion which is now too frequently absent. Thus a transfusion of blood in both directions will develop the general vitality of art.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{New York Times}, 5 Mar 1895, 4.

to deter Americans eager to see and hear Wagner operas from attending them. Sizeable audiences were reportedly present at each performance; the returns for the season were estimated to be around an astounding $150,000. As Henry Krehbiel interpreted the results:

I should like to keep the thought of this unparalleled financial success separate from that of the artistic results attained. Between the financial and artistic achievements there was a wide disparity; but that fact only sufficed to emphasize the obvious lesson of the season, namely, the vast desire which the people of New York felt again to enjoy Wagner’s dramas.

This desire was evident elsewhere in the United States. Immediately following the New York Season, the Damrosch Company (with their own scenery) embarked on a tour to six cities, including Kansas City, Louisville, and Pittsburgh, which had not been yet been visited by a troupe which had the Ring operas as part of its repertory. For eight weeks, a grueling schedule ensued: week-long stays in major urban centers like Boston, Chicago, and St. Louis were packed with presentations every evening from Monday to Saturday (with an additional matinee on Saturday). In addition, when not rehearsing or performing, Damrosch continued to deliver his Wagner lecture series in each city, to prepare Americans for his company’s performances.

As in New York, large numbers of Americans flocked to see the Damrosch Opera company perform Wagner, especially relishing the rare opportunity to see the operas of the Ring cycle. In Chicago, the Daily Tribune reporter noted that at the performance of Die Walküre (which, at the last minute, replaced the scheduled presentation of Tristan und Isolde), there were many Germans in the audience, who came to “listen to the music for music’s sake”, some of them with score in hand. A mostly-female audience assembled for a matinée performance of Siegfried in Kansas City, where Alvary’s hero won over many hearts. The North American

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43 As reported in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 14 Apr 1895, 31.
44 Chapters of Opera, 94.
45 Chicago Daily Tribune, 16 Apr 1895, 5. The schedule change was due to Sucher’s illness. For the same reason, a scheduled presentation of Götterdämmerung on April 20 was replaced by Tannhäuser.
46 According to Damrosch, a humorous incident occurred at this performance (see My Musical Life, 112). During Siegfried’s extended kiss that ultimately awakens Brünnhilde, he recalled that Suddenly, while I was conducting the exquisite music accompanying the extended kiss, someone in the gallery included to facetiousness imitated very distinctly the smacking sound of kissing, and, to my horror, little ripples do feminine laughter rose and fell, awoke and died, to be renewed again.
and the *Post-Dispatch* similarly described large and enthusiastic audiences in Philadelphia and St. Louis, respectively. And in Boston, where the operas were much better known, Louis C. Elson of the *Daily Advertiser* commended the Bostonians in attendance for having “reached a state of intelligent appreciation of the Wagnerian idea, especially in the matter of continuity and the following of the orchestral picture.”

Aspects of the performances were variously praised and critiqued, according to each critic’s predilection. Elson once again savored the intricacies of the orchestral score and its motives, but also had much to say about the stage elements, mostly about what did not work out. One obvious accommodation due to stage exigencies was the fifteen-minute pause between Siegfried’s funeral music and the finale of *Götterdämmerung* to allow for changes in the scenery. All three operas were performed in truncated versions (most of the cuts were the same as those from the Metropolitan’s German seasons under Seidl), although Elson was pleasantly surprised to hear the entirety of the “question-and-answer” dialogue between The Wanderer and Mime in Act I of *Siegfried*, stating that it helped refresh one’s memory of certain musical motives. Nevertheless, the performances still ran long, partly due to Damrosch’s tendency to drag the tempi in the parts more familiar to Americans as excerpts in the concert hall. The quality of the singing varied, and it was evident touring conditions took their toll. Alvary as Siegmund and the young Siegfried in Boston struggled with intonation problems and hoarseness but seemed to have recovered by the time the company was in Chicago. Sucher as Brünnhilde held her own in Act III of *Siegfried* in Boston and St. Louis, but was indisposed for the Chicago performances, where she was replaced by Elsa Kutscherra in her debut performance of the Valkyrie, which the *Daily Tribune’s* critic described as a laudable effort.

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Alvary was wonderful. He raised his handsome head, gazed with calm eyes at the audience until a deathlike silence reigned and then, with equal calm, returned to his previous occupation. It was certainly a triumph of man over woman, or rather women, and at the end of the act, they greeted this young god with special and adoring enthusiasm.

47 *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 4 Apr 1895, 5.
48 *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 6 Apr 1895, 8.
Among the most memorable performances in both Boston and Chicago were Paul Lange’s Mime and Johanna Gadski’s Sieglinde. Marie Brema also gave an especially impressive portrayal of Brünnhilde in the Boston presentation of Die Walküre, although Elson thought she was still no Amalie Materna. As for the orchestra, most papers deemed its performances excellent, and Damrosch was generally found to be a capable conductor.

Beyond these details in their reviews, there was a concerted effort on the part of the non-New York critics to frame their discussion regarding the quality of the Ring performances of the Damrosch troupe as positively as possible. While their New York counterparts complained about the inadequacies of the stagings, these journalists preferred to endorse Damrosch’s enterprise as a model for the “proper standard” of Wagnerian opera performance. As expressed in the Chicago Daily Tribune,

That which Mr. Damrosch has accomplished is not alone a reestablishment of German opera in America but the establishment of a proper standard of performance. Thorough concentration in the art rather than the artist has been the point aimed at and maintained. The sincerity of those engaged, the self-effacement in the roles without consideration of anything beyond truthful results, have given the power of naturalness. […] Flaws passed unnoticed or became ignored in the strength of the scenes as a whole. No point was overlooked, and the minor roles thoroughly rehearsed as well as the minor details show that value was regarded as equally distributed. It was a brave venture on the part of Mr. Damrosch and one thoroughly infused with the American spirit.”

This apparent discrepancy of opinion between New York and other American critics might be explained by the higher expectations of New York audiences, who had likely witnessed more staged performances of the Ring’s operas. By comparison, Americans elsewhere had less direct access to stagings (unless they were able to travel to New York often) and therefore, were still honing their understanding of the cycle. In either case, it can be concluded that critics were still in a position to be key shapers of American expectations at this time about what determined an adequate performance of an opera from the Ring cycle.

49 Chicago Daily Tribune, 21 Apr 1895, 39; see also St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 14 Apr 1895, 31.
The 1895-1896 season

At the close of his company’s New York and touring seasons, Damrosch had made a considerable profit of $53,000.\footnote{Damrosch, My Musical Life, 112.} Elated by the financial success of his enterprise (which to him, further solidified proof of the strong American interest in Wagner), he decided to embark on an even more ambitious schedule for the following year: a five-month season, beginning in November 1895 with an American tour and ending in March 1896 in New York. In a preview of the Damrosch Company’s season in the Chicago Daily Tribune, the tour was anticipated to be “the longest and most important tour ever laid out by a German opera management in this country”, with stops in: Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, Louisville, Nashville, Atlanta, New Orleans, Memphis, Omaha, Denver, Kansas City, St. Paul/Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Detroit, Toledo, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, Boston, Philadelphia, Albany, Springfield, Hartford, and New Haven.\footnote{Chicago Daily Tribune, 10 Nov 1895, 43.} In many of these cities, the troupe had only short, one- or two-day engagements, while they stayed longer, usually, one to two weeks at a time in others (notably, in Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, St. Paul/Minneapolis, and Boston). For New York, Damrosch’s original plans for the company to return to the Metropolitan Opera were thwarted by Abbey and Grau, who refused to grant him use of the house. It appeared that the recent success of the Damrosch troupe posed a threat to their own initiative to reintroduce Wagner’s operas (in German) into the resident company’s repertory that season.\footnote{According to Irving Kolodin, Maurice Grau was compelled to respond to his journalistic advisers and around 2,000 petitions that opera in the German language (notably, Wagner’s works) be featured every Thursday night of their company’s season. Seidl was subsequently hired to conduct all performances of Wagner’s operas. See Kolodin, The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1966; A Candid History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966). For a contemporary account of the situation, see the New York Times, 4 May 1895, 1.} Damrosch was undeterred, not least because he no longer had to rely so much on the Metropolitan’s resources, having now amassed a sizable stock of his own scenery from the Kautsky firm in Vienna, as well as new costumes and properties by Joseph Engelhardt. He resolved to have his company perform instead at the Metropolitan’s old rival, the Academy of Music. Not only would
it be the first time an opera would be given there since 1888 (the Academy had become a venue for vaudeville), but perhaps more significantly, it would be the first time any of the *Ring* operas were performed there. Ticket prices remained the same as the previous season, with subscriptions for an entire season ranging from $12 to $30 ($250 for boxes), and single tickets costing between $1 and $3 ($25 for boxes).

During the 1895–1896 season tour, Wagner’s *Ring* operas were performed in various cities, with one, two, or a “cycle” of three operas given, in some cases for the very first time, such as the “trilogy” of performances that took place in New Orleans. For the principal roles, Damrosch had engaged a brand new roster of artists, which included several singers from the Hamburg Stadt-theater then managed by Bernhard Pollini. Among them was the star soprano Katherine Klaflsky who sang the role of Brünnhilde, since Marie Brema, from the previous season, had already been hired by Abbey and Grau for their German opera performances. Klaflsky’s husband, Otto Lohse, was also hired, as assistant conductor to Damrosch, and he led some of the performances of the *Ring* operas in Chicago, Boston, New York, and New Orleans. Like Rosa Sucher last season, Klaflsky portrayed the Valkyrie for all performances of *Götterdämmerung*. Otherwise, she shared the role in *Die Walküre* with Milka Ternina (who was also from Pollini’s company and joined the company mid-tour in Boston), as well as in *Siegfried* with the sopranos Gisela Stoll and Louise Mulder, the latter then one of the youngest members of the company. Mulder, who had sang Eva at the 1890 Bayreuth Festival, also portrayed Sieglinde, and a new tenor, Barron Berthold, assumed the role of Siegmund. Emil Fischer returned to reprise the roles of Wotan and Hagen, although Damrosch gave the part of The Wanderer exclusively to Gerhard Stehmann, having been so impressed with the amateur bass-baritone from St. Louis who filled in for an indisposed Franz Schwarz during last season’s tour. Max Alvary retained his role as the young Siegfried while the mature hero was sung by Wilhelm Grünbing. Both Grünbing and the Romanian baritone, Dmitri Popovici, hired to sing Gunther in New York, were members of Pollini’s Hamburg company, and were also “veterans” of Bayreuth;
Grüning was selected by Julius Kneise to interpret *Parsifal* during the 1889 Festival, and Popovici had recently worked with Cosima for the part of Telramund for the 1894 Festival. Minna Schilling, who was Gerhilde in the previous season, was given the roles of the Forest Bird and Woglinde as well. Other characters of the *Ring* filled by singers new to Damrosch’s company, included: Julius Von Putlitz (Hunding, Fafner); Wilhelm Mertens (Alberich, Gunther); and the Hungarian soprano, Riza Eibenschütz (Erda, Gutrune). In total, the company was comprised of one hundred and seventy people including an orchestra of seventy, the entirety of which was taken on tour. In Damrosch’s view, “I considered so large an aggregation my solemn duty as a Wagner disciple and propagandist.”

Contemporary reports indicate that the Damrosch Company’s tour started off with great success in Cincinnati and Chicago, where immense audiences reportedly filled the Walnut Street Theatre and the Auditorium, respectively. Presumably, these performances attracted a sizeable number of German-Americans, since both cities had substantial populations of this demographic. The week of performances in Cincinnati opened with *Die Walküre*, about which a correspondent for the *New York Times* described that his only objection to the performance was that it was given in too small an auditorium. In Chicago, the critic of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* admired the new scenic effects in *Siegfried*:

> One was the death of the dragon, a new dragon with all the mediaeval improvements, in full light; the other was the shimmering of the sunlight as caused by the wavering foliage. The latter was beautifully done and enhanced in fine fashion the stage setting, which, this season, is in one respect more satisfactory than before. The detail in the foregrounds has been elaborately developed, and a result more fully in keeping with Wagnerian traditions obtained.

Unfortunately, at the matinee performance of the same opera, a backstage explosion rendered the dragon useless at the moment it was to appear at the mouth of the cave. Alvary and Von Putlitz tried to maintain the illusion, especially the latter, who continued to sing “notwithstanding...

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54 Cincinnati’s larger Music Hall, a more appropriate venue for opera, was being remodeled at the time and was therefore unavailable to the Damrosch company. See *New York Times*, 13 Nov 1895, 6.
55 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 Nov 1895, 5.
his sudden entanglement in steam pipes and escaping vapor." Overall, the *Ring* performances in Chicago were commended, in particular Klafsky’s excellent singing and physically animated portrayal of Brünnhilde. Alvary’s young Siegfried was still an audience draw, but Grüning’s debut as the hero in *Götterdämmerung*, was “not so pleasant”, and his singing and acting was found to lack polish. The *Tribune* critic reserved his greatest praise for Gustav Harder, the stage manager, for “sustaining with fidelity the illusion that must exist for unqualified enjoyment.”

In St. Louis and New Orleans, where the “trilogy” from the *Ring* cycle was next featured, the Damrosch Company was met with enthusiastic but much smaller audiences than were in Cincinnati and Chicago. The critic of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, William Schuyler, was disappointed by the low attendance of his city’s public at, in his opinion, an artistically successful *Die Walküre*, “The St. Louis musical public,” he wrote, “should redeem themselves for the stigma of a lack of appreciation for the best of music, which they have unfortunately shown during this engagement of the Damrosch Company.” The performances appeared to fare quite well at the Music Hall; the scenery was regarded as particularly effective in *Siegfried*, and Schuyler was pleased to see that in *Götterdämmerung*, for the first time, the transition known as “Siegfried’s Journey” between the second prologue and the first scene of Act I, was performed with no interruption in the music to accommodate scenic changes. The costumes for the final opera were also deemed striking, and the naturalness of the chorus “well-handled.” The final scene of Brünnhilde’s immolation, however, was badly executed due to the “very poor scenic arrangement”, “the transparent picture representing the Gods in Valhalla being very disappointing.” The orchestra under Damrosch’s conductorship was thought to be excellent for all three operas of the *Ring*. As for the singers, the thirty-one year old Berthold as Siegmund impressed even for his youth, Klafsky was excellent as the Valkyrie (though not as imposing as Brema or Lehmann), and Mulder’s Sieglinde was deemed “lovable.” Gisela Stoll made her first

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56 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 Dec 1895, 3.
57 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 4 Dec 1895, 6.
58 See *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 5 Dec 1895, 9; and 6 Dec 1895, 7.
appearance as Brünnhilde in *Siegfried* but her conscientious interpretation did not translate obviously enough through her voice and gestures, and she struggled to reach the high parts of the final scene.

In New Orleans the company gave the first performances of the *Ring* operas in that city. However, as in St. Louis, the audiences far from packed the lavish, 4,000-seat St. Charles Theatre, despite the perceived historical and cultural import of the event. Some of the city’s sizable German population must have turned out for the performances, but in general, local tastes were much more strongly directed to Italian and French opera, which already had a long history there.\(^5^9\) By comparison, interest in German opera had been much slower to develop. Prior to the Damrosch company, only J.C. Fryer’s troupe had visited the city with any Wagner opera; in 1877, they had given *Der fliegende Holländer, Tannhäuser, and Lohengrin* in Italian translation. Damrosch was therefore the first to offer the latter two in German, along with the city’s premieres of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger*. The trio of operas from the *Ring*, in particular, was most anticipated, and in the interest of initiating readers to the cycle, the critic of *The Daily Picayune* preferred to describe the operas over reviewing the performances, whose quality he simply summed up as “excellent”.\(^6^0\) The audiences, though small, were clearly appreciative, as demonstrated by the “hearty applause and numerous recalls” at the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung*.

Following New Orleans, the *Ring* operas were given sparingly—i.e. only one or two performances—in subsequent cities, but it was clear a genuine interest in Wagner had developed beyond the major urban centers of the U.S. An article in *The Commercial Appeal* of Memphis discussed how its civilians were apparently absorbed in the study of the composer’s music and could talk intelligently about it (a performance of *Siegfried* was scheduled there but


\(^{60}\) For reviews of *Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung*, see *The Daily Picayune*, 18 Dec 1895, 7; 19 Dec 1895, 9; and 20 Dec 1895, 8, respectively.
was replaced at the last minute by Tannhäuser.\textsuperscript{61} In Denver a performance of Die Walküre was attended by a “brilliant house” that was “fully appreciative” of the merits of the performance.\textsuperscript{62} The positive response was strong enough that the company decided to give a special matinee performance of Siegfried on Thursday afternoon of January 2, 1896, but with the third act cut “due to lack of time.”\textsuperscript{63} (One wonders how this truncated version was received, as the third act drama between Brünhilde and Siegfried is regarded as the climax of the opera.) The Milwaukee Journal reported that Die Walküre was successful in Minneapolis, and that its upcoming staging in Milwaukee was already well sold and was still selling rapidly.\textsuperscript{64} The disappointment must have been substantial then when the presentation had to be cancelled on account of the sudden indisposition of Klafsky. Siegfried, though, was given a strong performance, despite its many cuts (which were not favored by the Journal’s critic), and featured a “very delightful” Louis Mulder as Brünhilde, the “most perfect interpretation” of Siegfried by Max Alvary, as well as a “new Viennese dragon…a very fine specimen of this class of ornithological-therology.”\textsuperscript{65}

The Damrosch troupe then went on to Boston for a two-week season, where another “trilogy” of operas from the Ring cycle was given. By then, almost three months into the tour, the company had solidified into a strong ensemble, and the critics of the Daily Advertiser, Louis C. Elson and his son, Arthur Elson (1873–1940) noted a dramatic improvement from the performances of the previous residency. About Die Walküre, the younger Elson wrote:

\begin{quote}
Not only the part of Siegmund, but the whole opera, was given with an ease and smoothness that did much to make last night’s performance the best that has been given for years. The excellence of the orchestral reading has already been mentioned; it was supplemented by true intonation and great breadth of style on the part of the singers, and by a correctness in action that spoke well for both individual effort and general stage management. The little mechanical details that often impede or spoil the action were managed with due efficiency; the light flashed on the sword-hilt at the proper time, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{61} The Commercial Appeal, 22 Nov 1895, 5.
\textsuperscript{62} See review in The Denver Evening Post, 1 Jan 1896, 4.
\textsuperscript{63} See The Denver Evening Post, 3 Jan 1896, 4.
\textsuperscript{64} The Milwaukee Daily Journal, 5 Jan 1896, 12; see also The Milwaukee Sentinel, 13 Jan 1896, 3.
\textsuperscript{65} The Milwaukee Journal, 16 Jan 1896, 2.
sword came out without trying to disappoint Siegmund by sticking in the tree, and the magic fire obligingly refrained from consuming the scenery.  

The principal singers did well: Berthold and Mulder fulfilled the parts of the Wolsung twins effectively; Marie Maurer was commended for her spirited acting which did much to relieve the oft-cited monotony of the dialogue-heavy second act; and Milka Ternina, who just joined the company, gave a strong performance of Brünnhilde. The orchestra too sounded excellent throughout, guided by Damrosh’s much-improved conducting.  

Similarly, the elder Elson found the stage management for Siegfried much smoother than last year’s; as he remarked,  

“Siegfried” is one of the hardest feats of good stage managing: there are many places where a slip would cause either laughter or a general collapse of the action. Neither event occurred last night, and the forge-scene, the burning mountain, the struggles of the dragon, and all the other accessories were commendably presented.  

There were some modifications in the cuts made to the opera, perhaps a decision of Otto Lohse, who conducted the performance instead of Damrosch; for example, in exchange for the omission of the scene with Erda and Wotan (an unfortunate loss, thought the critic), the debate between the Wanderer and Mime was retained in full. Paul Lange’s superb acting though, reportedly helped to sustain interest in this scene which was otherwise substantially shortened in most stagings. Alvary’s singing in the title role was also considerably improved, and Ternina was “destined to become a favorite” in the role of Brünnhilde. Under Lohse’s direction, the orchestra achieved “careful shading and delicate elasticity”, although Elson desired more lushness in the “Waldweben” scene.  

The reviews concerning the Ring operas, particularly those that appeared in the Boston and New York newspapers, continued to focus on what constituted good Wagnerian singing. In other words, critics were, to an extent, becoming more performer-centric, rather than work-centric or even Wagner-centric. In the opinion of William James Henderson, the critic of the New  

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66 Boston Daily Advertiser, 5 Feb 1896, 8.  
67 Boston Daily Advertiser, 7 Feb 1896, 8.
York Times, Wagner’s operas were now so well-assimilated into the city’s musical culture that any controversy over the composer’s music was basically ended, thus leaving only matters of interpretation to discuss.\textsuperscript{68} He himself had a strong agenda to educate American audiences about what qualified as excellent singing in performances of Wagner’s operas, because he thought they did not yet fully understand what these attributes were. As he wrote:

[The audiences at the Damrosch German opera performances] know all about the music dramas to which they are listening. [...] They understand what the orchestra is about too. [...] In short, they listen with understanding and with affection. [...] But they have weird ideas about singing. As long as the people on the stage enunciate the words of the text so that they can understand them, these good lovers of German music drama are content. They apparently know nothing at all about the graces of the art of song, or, at any rate, they seem not to care about them.\textsuperscript{69}

In Henderson’s view, the cause for misunderstanding was due, in part, to an apparent over-emphasis by German vocalists on acting over beautiful singing, having taken the view that they were in service to the drama, not vehicles for vocal display, and thus erroneously taking Wagner’s principle to the extreme. Henderson heavily criticized Alvary as the young Siegfried who, while a good actor (and very popular with American audiences), his performances were often inconsistent, hampered by poor intonation, and vowel distortion. By comparison, Milka Ternina’s Brünnhilde was among the best performances Henderson had ever heard in that part (save Lilli Lehmann):

It is true that Ternina’s voice is deficient in that kind of flexibility needed for coloratura song; but in pure cantilena it moves in the most graceful curves of sound. The production of the voice is almost flawless, and the phrasing exquisite. The woman always sings with just intonation too... [Her] acting is not strikingly original, but it is judicious, and means something.\textsuperscript{70}

In the same vein, he found Paul Lange’s Mime to be excellent, as was Popovici’s Gunther and Fischer’s Hagen (though Louis Elson of the Boston Daily Advertiser found the latter’s interpretation too tame). Less satisfactory, however, were Mertens’s portrayal of Alberich, Riza Eibenschütz’s Gutrune (“too mild and un-engaging”) and the Rhinedaughters’

\textsuperscript{68} See New York Times, 15 Mar 1896, 11.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
final trio, which were given out of tune. Nevertheless, their acting skills appeared to have made up for their vocal failings, carrying out the drama effectively, judging by the reports of attentive audiences that packed the Academy of Music to capacity for Siegfried and Götterdämmerung. Henderson appreciated that they excelled in the “unanimous sincerity of purpose. The singing actors were all working together for a common end, which they thoroughly understood.”

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Although the Damrosch Opera Company expanded American audiences for the Ring operas during the 1895–1896 season, they finished with a deficit of $43,000, most of which had been lost on the winter tour. A part of the debt ($8,000 to $10,000) was predicted to be the result of unexpectedly small audiences at the performances in St. Louis. In an interview with a reporter from the Post-Dispatch, Damrosch expressed puzzlement by the low turnout, but cited that the high operational expenses of the company were perhaps more to blame:

The reasons for the poor attendance I am unable to give. There seems to be a strong musical sentiment in St. Louis. My lectures are well attended, and the audiences at the Music Hall are attentive and appreciative. But they are not large enough to pay the expenses of Wagnerian opera productions. It costs a great deal of money to run my company.  

The Dispatch reporter wondered if it was because Wagner’s music was unpopular (or was becoming so) but Damrosch disagreed. Giving an indirect answer, Damrosch mused that sometimes, Wagner’s operas simply did not draw large numbers of attendees, even in cities with significant German populations, such as the case with the Ring performances in New Orleans.

Another possible explanation for the deficit may be the ticket prices, which, while low by New York standards, were found to be expensive in other cities, such as Denver. Either

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72 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 6 Dec 1895, 7.
Americans were deterred altogether by the cost of tickets, or, as in the case of Milwaukee, more of them preferred to sit in the cheaper parts of the house since it was more affordable. As the critic of the *Sentinel* noticed:

> The second gallery, indeed, was the most crowded part of the house during all four performances….and its occupants were an interesting subject of study. There are few who can afford to spend $20 a night for opera, not many men of families. With $4 a seat, it was a hard task especially for men of families to go to the opera. They bought seats in the gallery, and among the “gods” were some of the leading and best known people of Milwaukee. They climbed the high stairway and sat under the roof in an atmosphere which is not exactly pleasing, but they have heard the opera. Young people earning small salaries, yet fond of music and curious to see Wagner opera performed, were there. Men of small salaries, students, teachers, typewriter girls were there, and even well-known business men were among the occupants of the second gallery.\(^73\)

According to this observation, performances of Wagner’s operas evidently attracted many middle-class Americans in cities outside the main urban centres of performance. However, this demographic alone certainly was not able cover the significant expenses incurred by the production of the composer’s works, especially one as monumental as the *Ring* cycle.

Women formed a significant portion of American audiences for the performances of the *Ring* operas by the Damrosch Company. A significant number of them belonged to the upper-class. They chiefly attended the matinee performances, but more importantly, they were the principal sponsors (and attendees) of Damrosch’s Wagner lecture-recitals, which he gave in nearly every city while on tour. In Cincinnati, the lectures (which included two on the *Ring*), were given under the auspices of the Cincinnati Women’s club. In St. Louis, the Ladies Tuesday Musicale hosted the series at the city’s Memorial Hall, where they were scheduled for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings at 10 am (the time suggests that it was unlikely many men were present as most of them worked during the day.)\(^74\) Philadelphia’s first social club for women, the New Century Club, hosted a Damrosch lecture on the entire “Nibelung Trilogy” in February 1896.\(^75\) The New Orleans paper, *The Daily Picayune*, featured a long review and

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\(^73\) *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 19 Jan 1896, 12.
\(^74\) *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1 Dec 1895, 33.
\(^75\) A review was printed in *The North American*, 21 Feb 1896, 6.
summary of Damrosch’s lecture on Die Walküre, which took place at Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, and was sponsored by the Quarante Club, a women’s book club founded to promote literature by female writers. The article stated that “a very large and intelligent audience was present.” Damrosch’s lecture-recitals also drew very large audiences in Minneapolis, up to a thousand people, according to The Milwaukee Journal. In Milwaukee, the “Monday Musical Club” hosted the lectures on Die Walküre and Siegfried in the afternoon at the Athenaeum. These were open to the public, but anybody unable to attend could read the summaries in The Milwaukee Journal; Damrosch’s explanation of the various motives in Siegfried was quoted here in full, as an abbreviated, readable version of his lecture. The popularity of the Wagner season was especially evident in Chicago, where Damrosch gave several series of lectures-recitals on the cycle’s operas: one at Apollo Hall, where such a large crowd reportedly attended his Siegfried presentation that many had to stand; another at the University of Chicago; and a third series of four talks at Steinway Hall, sponsored by the “Amateur Musical Club”, more formally named the Musicians’ Club of Women.

As a whole, this proliferation of women’s clubs in cities throughout the United States was part of a greater social movement, committed to self-improvement and cultural reform. Being educated about Wagner’s operas, especially the Ring, became an integral aspect of achieving these ideals. Notably, Damrosch’s lecture-recitals, perhaps more than any other organization at the time, helped foster intellectual understanding of the cycle, by elucidating its various motives, and advising good listening strategies. Ultimately, these talks were perhaps Damrosch’s most successful contribution to furthering the “Wagner cause” in the U.S., especially in building an intelligent, appreciative American audience for the Ring. Many of them were women, like Sophie Furniss, a wealthy American socialite and friend of the Damrosch family. As Walter remembered

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76 The Daily Picayune, 18 Dec 1895, 6.
77 See The Milwaukee Journal, 14 Jan 1896, 2; and 15 Jan 1896, 3.
78 See Horowitz’s discussion in Wagner Nights, especially 232–34. For musicological perspectives on this topic, see Locke and Barr’s Cultivating Music in America.
Almost every night during my opera season of six weeks...she listened to the Wagnerian music-dramas with unflagging attention. Not even the length of “Götterdämmerung” or “Meistersinger” would phase her, and after the performance, during supper, she would proudly repeat, while her eyes fairly snapped with laughter, some remark of mine that I had made two years before at their country place in Lenox during my delivery of a series of explanatory recitals on the “Nibelung Trilogy”.  

The 1896-1897 season

Despite the losses from the previous season, Damrosch went ahead and planned another, still buoyed by the significant interest that Americans continued to show in his endeavor to bring Wagner’s operas to them. Although his company was not always artistically successful or even consistent, their earnest efforts had drawn fair-sized to packed houses, not to mention the huge popularity of Damrosch’s lecture-recitals. They fared far better though than the recent German season managed by Abbey and Grau at the Metropolitan Opera, which suffered a more substantial deficit of $150,000 (according to Damrosch’s memoir). Having become aware of Damrosch’s success with the Wagner repertoire during the past two seasons, Abbey and Grau had decided to capture their share of the American demand for the composer’s later operas, by having their resident company reintroduce Tristan und Isolde and Die Walküre in German. However, these presentations reportedly suffered from woefully inadequate staging, likely caused by insufficient rehearsal time, for which even Seidl’s excellent conducting could not entirely compensate. Curiously as well, the New York public, even the “Wagnerites”, stayed away from these performances; according to the review of Die Walküre in the New York Times, its presentation failed to draw half a house, and the critic speculated it was because “the connoisseur must have known what the results of the performance would be long before it was

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80 William J. Henderson of the Times attributed the problem to Grau’s management, because “Wagner opera in the German manner was new to him. Mr. Seidl knew it, but it probably never occurred to him that he would be expected to put on such a work as “Die Walküre” with one or two orchestral rehearsals.” New York Times, 17 Jan 1896, 4.
given, for there was much lacking of an ideal presentation.” To ensure that the upcoming season did not attain similarly meagre results, Abbey and Grau approached Damrosch to negotiate a plan to share resources by which the two companies could mutually benefit. Essentially, the managers of both troupes now realized that an opera season would be more financially viable if it offered a balanced program of French, Italian, and German works, to be performed by the best musicians of each operatic tradition. Grau wanted some of Damrosch’s German singers to strengthen his roster, particularly for his company’s revival of Siegfried. Damrosch, in turn, would have several of their French and Italian stars who could best interpret the works he had recently added to his company’s repertoire, notably, Don Giovanni, Faust, Carmen, and Il Trovatore. As a further gesture of goodwill and generosity, Abbey and Grau allowed Damrosch to rent the Metropolitan Opera again for his company’s New York season in March 1897.

To prevent further losses, the new season did not include an ambitious American tour for the company but Damrosch did take his troupe to cities that guaranteed financial support. A number of enthusiastic backers from St. Louis gathered enough funds to ensure a week of performances, despite the disappointing turnout of last year. In Philadelphia, a committee at the Academy of Music offered his company a guarantee for the regular opera season, as well as use of the Academy as an artistic base of operations to conduct rehearsals, and a permanent place for Damrosch’s store of scenery, costumes, and properties. The security provided by this latter arrangement likely encouraged Damrosch to finally incorporate Das Rheingold into this season’s repertory, and enabled him to acquire for his company more advanced stage technology for the opera’s difficult stage effects. Therefore for the first time since the German seasons at the Metropolitan in 1890, the complete Ring cycle was performed in Philadelphia,

81 New York Times, 10 Jan 1896, 4.
82 According to Damrosch’s memoir, this arrangement did occur, although the details are quite vague as to which singers were shared. See My Musical Life, 122.
Boston, and New York. Individual presentations of the *Ring*’s operas were also given in Washington, DC (where *Siegfried* was witnessed by a large audience that included the President and members of the Cabinet), Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh. Chicago, surprisingly, was not among the company’s destinations that season, a situation about which that city’s press provided little explanation.

For the *Ring* performances, Damrosch continued to hire a combination of well-known interpreters and those making their American debuts. Among those in the former group was Lilli Lehmann, her first reappearance in the U.S. since the German seasons at the Metropolitan; her comeback as Brünnhilde was highly anticipated. Her husband, Paul Kalisch, also joined the company, to take on the part of the mature Siegfried in the performances of *Götterdämmerung*. Other returnees from seasons past, some taking on roles in the new production of *Das Rheingold*, included: Emil Fischer (Wotan, Hagen); Paul Lange (Mime); Wilhelm Mertens (Alberich, in *Rheingold* and *Siegfried*), Gerhard Stehmann (Donner, The Wanderer); Johanna Gadski (Sieglinde, Gutrune); and Riza Eibenschütz (Fricka, Erda, Flosshilde). The handsome thirty-two-year-old Ernst Kraus, recently engaged at the Berlin Royal Opera, was the Damrosch Company’s new Siegfried; he also shared the role of Siegmund with Kalisch and Fritz Ernst, another tenor new to the troupe, who was cast also as Loge. The English soprano Susan Strong, who had great success as an interpreter of German opera at Covent Garden did double-duty as Sieglinde in the Boston and St. Louis performances of *Die Walküre*, and Brünnhilde of *Siegfried* in Philadelphia and Washington. Frau Mohar-Ravenstein, the acclaimed German

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83 It should be noted that a full cycle was scheduled for the New York season but *Siegfried* (to be performed on Friday, 2 April) was cancelled at the last minute due to the illness of the tenor, Ernst Kraus. A presentation of *Götterdämmerung* was given instead, followed by a repeat performance on Saturday, April 3. New York reporters noted, however, that a performance of *Siegfried* was given on March 24, immediately before the start of the cycle which at least offered some idea of the complete work.

84 According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in July 1896, it was anticipated that Damrosch would provide a season of opera at the Auditorium. However, this did not occur, and the press did not discuss the matter, even though it showed heavy interest in the activities of the Damrosch company elsewhere, providing reviews of their performances in other cities. Neither Robert C. Marsh nor Ronald L. Davis in their respective studies, 150 Years of Opera in Chicago (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, 2006), and Opera in Chicago (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966) discussed the absence of the Damrosch Company from Chicago for the 1896–1897 season.
soprano from Hamburg, was hired at the last minute to take on the parts of the previous season’s star, Katherine Klafsky, who had died suddenly a few months before. However, Ravenstein sang only once as Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre*, while Lehmann or Strong undertook the rest of the performances. The star American soprano, Lillian Nordica, also played the Valkyrie for a New York performance of *Siegfried*. The remaining principal roles of the *Ring* operas were filled by additional fresh faces and novel voices: Augusta Vollmar as the Forest Bird and Woglinde; Fritz Derschuch as Fafner and Hunding, Marie Brandis as Gutrune, and Carl Somer as Gunther.

Of the *Ring* performances throughout this season, critical attention was paid mostly to *Das Rheingold*, as it was the “novelty”, and had not been staged in the U.S. since the German seasons at the Metropolitan Opera. Unlike the other operas of the *Ring, Das Rheingold* was only performed in Philadelphia, Boston and New York, probably because the theatres in those cities—the Academy of Music, the Boston Theatre, and the Metropolitan Opera House, respectively—were among the few venues with stage technology sophisticated enough to be able to accommodate the opera’s many challenging stage effects. It was probably Damrosch’s most expensive production, since he had to purchase some of the machinery himself, such as a new contraption for the swimming Rhinedaughters. Instead of using the moveable carts from the 1876 production, Damrosch looked to the most recent staging of the *Ring* at the 1896 Bayreuth Festival, where an elaborate system of cable wires was used to raise and lower the singers. According to several American papers, he had these machines duplicated exactly for a considerable outlay of $2,000.85 In the end, the novel apparatus seemed to be worth the price and the singers appeared to prefer it; as one reporter described:

A cable was stretched above the stage from wall to wall, and to this were attached invisible wires, one for each girl. The cable moved in various directions by ropes, handled on the stage, the illusion of swimming is very pleasing. With the old wires used years ago the part of the singers was far from enviable, and many became very ill.

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85 See *The North American*, 16 Jan 1897, 6; and *New York Times*, 29 Mar 1897, 7.
In performance also, many critics found this illusion entirely convincing; the correspondent for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* exclaimed that the “Rheinmaidens swam better than ever before in this country.”\(^86\) Louis C. Elson of the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, however, was more skeptical, since the machinery had affected the quality of the singing in the opera’s opening scene; in his view, “the Rhine Daughters sang only fairly well in the first act; who could sing while swinging about on precarious ropes!...When they were unhooked and sang in the last act they gave glorious work.”\(^87\)

Broad appreciation was expressed in general for these few performances of *Das Rheingold* by the Damrosch company. The critic of the *North American* especially admired Fritz Ernst’s portrayal of Loge in Philadelphia, which he found to be well-conceived and well-executed. In the New York performances, the correspondent for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that the drama was finely acted by all the singers, even though vocal quality was mixed. Damrosch’s conducting was reportedly much improved compared to previous seasons, for he was able to better control the volume of his orchestra so the singers’ lines were heard more clearly. He was especially praised for his initiative to revive *Das Rheingold* on U.S. soil, even if the production was not entirely satisfactory (in the view of several critics, only the Bayreuth Festspielhaus had the appropriate machinery and conditions to stage it adequately). The presentations were attended by “large and brilliant” audiences, according to Elson, a response which heartened him especially, since the opera was often considered the least appealing of the cycle; as he wrote: “Altogether a memorable performance not entirely without flaws, but one that will make this little-known opera (or prologue) better loved and understood in Boston. It is the lofty portico to the greatest musical edifice that any man has built.”\(^88\)

The Damrosch Company’s performances of the other operas from the *Ring* received reviews similar to previous seasons. Once again, there was a greater emphasis in general on

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\(^86\) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 Mar 1897, 5.  
\(^87\) *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 11 Feb 1897, 8.  
\(^88\) Ibid.
evaluating singers’ interpretations of the principal roles. Among them, Paul Kalisch was singled out especially for making a remarkable improvement in the roles of Siegmund and the mature Siegfried since his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in 1889. According to the critic for The North American in Philadelphia: “[Kalisch’s] voice has materially gained in volume and quality; he sings with an accent of authority which he did not formerly possess, and his dramatic action, which used to be tentative and hesitating, is now vigorous and assured. His Siegmund was a noble impersonation…”

The tenor was likewise commended by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. In Boston, Ernst Kraus sounded “inspiring” in his American debut as the young Siegfried, rousing Lehmann as Brünnhilde to a glorious performance in the love duet of the final scene of the opera. His singing of the forging scene was equally memorable. Unfortunately, Kraus’s health deteriorated as the season went on: in St. Louis, he suffered a bad cold through a performance, but in New York, the installment of Siegfried in the scheduled presentation of the full Ring cycle had to be cancelled on account of his illness. In the Philadelphia cycle, Lehmann took a break between Die Walküre and Götterdämmerung, allowing Susan Strong to shine in the final act of Siegfried as Brünnhilde, which was described as an “agreeable surprise”, by The North American. Nordica’s interpretation of the same part in New York received high praised by the Times’ William J. Henderson, who hoped her performance would “challenge the belief that only Germans can properly understand and interpret the spirit of Wagner’s works.”

Overall, the visual, musical, and dramatic elements of the Damrosch productions of Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung were found to be quite well-integrated and coherent, honed over giving repeated performances of these operas during the last two seasons. The scenery was felt to have served its purpose adequately (even though extensive touring had made them somewhat shopworn) and the coordination of the effects by the stage manager.

89 The North American, 21 Jan 1897, 4.
90 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 23 Feb 1897, 7.
appeared to have been accomplished smoothly. The critic Henderson even advised the Abbey/Grau opera company to study the performances of the *Ring* operas by the Damrosch troupe for the reason of “the manner in which [the latter company’s] artists help to preserve the dramatic illusion by addressing their declamation to one another, and not to the audience.”92

The relatively high quality of the performances drew sizable and eager crowds of Americans. In Boston, a storm did not prevent them from completely filling the auditorium at the Boston Theatre for a rather excellent performance of *Siegfried*, according to Elson, “those who braved the elements to attend must have felt amply repaid for they will have a pleasant memory for a lifetime.” In St. Louis, the critic for the *Post-Dispatch* noticed the hypnotic effect *Die Walküre* had on many of his fellow citizens, and mused about the drama’s obvious sensual power, about which he seemed somewhat ambivalent:

> The audience last night seemed thoroughly absorbed in the work. Half a dozen times a glance at the darkened auditorium showed every spectator intent upon the stage picture. The faces even in the [1][lime-light showed the play of emotion as the orchestra told the story of passion. There is food for reflection in this. Not all of them knew the keynote to the composer’s thoughts—that wonderful sign language of “motifs.” They did not understand the dialogue of the characters. If they had, like the good church people, they would have withheld rapturously applauding the incestuous wooing of brother and sister. Yet they were slaves to the spell that one man who from the depths of the orchestra drew murmurs of ecstatic love, storms of passion, whirlwinds of hate. It is a psychological wonder.93

At a performance of the same opera at the Metropolitan Opera, a “largely Teutonic” audience was seen to be similarly spell-bound, and seemed especially thrilled by the return of “their own” Lilli Lehmann as Brünnhilde. As well, American women of various classes were observed to form a major portion of attendees at the *Ring* performances, especially the matinées. As the *Post-Dispatch* testified, there were fifty women for every man at the Saturday afternoon presentation of *Siegfried* in St. Louis, who “got in on general admissions, and… packed the dress circle and balcony.”94

92 Ibid.
93 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 23 Feb 1897, 7.
The 1896–1897 season of the Damrosch Opera Company ended on relatively successful financial terms, considering the sizeable expenses for the new production of *Das Rheingold*. Losses incurred in some of the cities they performed were compensated by profits made in other locations; Damrosch had operated with this risk in mind (for example, although his company suffered a loss of $3,500 in St. Louis, he refused to claim the guarantee funds set up by sponsors in that city, in the hope that the deficit would be covered elsewhere). Artistically though, the Damrosch troupe was still considered the premier Wagner opera troupe in the United States, and the first to revive the entire *Ring* cycle since 1890.

Meanwhile, at the Metropolitan Opera, Abbey’s unexpected passing in October 1896 left Grau as the manager of the resident company at the beginning of its season (Schoeffel had since become heavily preoccupied with a new project, the Tremont Theatre in Boston). With little time to reorganize, Grau focused on carrying out Abbey’s plans and policies, some of which affected the resident company’s performances of the Wagner repertory in peculiar ways. *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* both received bilingual stagings: the former featured Emma Eames singing in German while the rest of the cast performed the Italian translation; the latter was given a similar French/Italian mix. *Die Meistersinger* continued to be performed in Italian. Only *Tristan und Isolde* and a new production of *Siegfried* were performed in German, but by a roster of mostly non-German singers.

By the end of their respective seasons, both Grau and Damrosch had determined that the best way for their companies to maintain financial and artistic viability was to offer a balanced repertory of French, Italian, and German operas, each work performed in the original language of the text, by artists who specialized in one, two, or all three of these traditions. Initially, a rumor circulated that the two managers would join forces but Grau had opted to spend
the following year reorganizing the Metropolitan’s resident company.95 Damrosch, on the other hand, formed a partnership with Charles Ellis, then the manager of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and of the famed Australian soprano, Nellie Melba. (According to Damrosch, it was Melba who encouraged Ellis to form an alliance with him because she wanted to join his company).96 Together, they planned a comprehensive program of French, Italian, and German operas, evenly distributed between the three varieties, and hired singers who were appropriately trained and experienced in interpreting them. The New York Symphony was maintained as the company’s orchestra, and was alternately led by Damrosch, for the German (i.e. Wagner) works, and the Italian conductor, Oreste Bimboni, for the French and Italian repertoire. A chorus was formed as well from singers of the Metropolitan Opera, and supplemented with Italians brought over to the United States by Bimboni. The Damrosch-Ellis Opera Company was the first to establish this flexible “wing” system of opera production and performance that would later evolve into standard practice with opera companies and theatres in the U.S.

With the shift in the balance of the repertory, the number of performances of the Ring operas, not surprisingly, decreased. Das Rheingold was entirely dropped; in fact, there was no clear plan to present the entire Ring as a cycle, except for during the New York season (in the end, the performance of the “prologue” scheduled to be given there was later cancelled, and only the “trilogy” was performed). For the touring season, a new scheme was implemented whereby the company traveled together to Boston, Chicago, and Cincinnati, then divided into two troupes, the German wing going on to Cleveland, Buffalo, and Detroit, and the Italian-French wing to the Pacific Coast. It is not evident from press sources whether any operas from the Ring were given in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Buffalo, and Detroit, but Die Walküre and Siegfried

95 See Chicago Daily Tribune, 6 Apr 1897, 5.
96 The union was announced in the Chicago Daily Tribune, 7 Apr 1897, 2. Perhaps Melba had hoped Damrosch would cast her as Brünnhilde in the Ring operas. In the previous season, she was a member of Grau’s company at the Metropolitan and had exclusive rights to the part in their production of Siegfried. However, she only gave one performance in that role, as it became apparent she was ill-suited for it.
were certainly presented in Boston and Chicago.°⁷ The German season began with a six-week stay at Philadelphia’s Academy of Music, where a total of twenty performances were given; of these, twelve were of works by Wagner, including a new production of *Der fliegende Holländer*, but there was only one performance each of *Siegfried* and *Die Walküre*. In New York, five presentations of the *Ring* operas (with two of *Götterdämmerung*) occurred over a five-week season. Tickets were sold at similar prices to previous seasons but remarkably, the decreased number of performances of the cycle’s operas helped boost interest and demand for them; even the stockholders who had the parterre boxes at the Metropolitan Opera fought amongst themselves over which performances they could use them.°⁸ At the end of the tour, it was reported that the Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Chicago seasons were all very profitable for the German troupe, and no guarantees had to be used to offset costs.

For the *Ring* operas, the German wing of the company retained many of the German singers from Damrosch’s past seasons, such as Emil Fischer as Wotan and Hagen, Gerhard Stehmann as The Wanderer, and Ernst Kraus as Siegmund and Siegfried. Johanna Gadski returned to reprise her role as Sieglinde as well, and she also sang Brünnhilde in the Chicago performance of *Siegfried*. Among the new German vocalists in the troupe were a husband-and-wife team, Josef and Gisela Staudigl. Josef, who had performed at the Metropolitan Opera only once before—in 1884–1885, when he portrayed Wotan for the house’s premiere of *Die Walküre* under Leopold Damrosch—was cast as Gunther. Gisela undertook the roles of Erda and Flosshilde; although this was her first engagement in the U.S., some Americans may have already heard her at the Bayreuth Festival, where she recently sang the parts of Brangaene and

°⁷ A performance of *Götterdämmerung* was scheduled for Boston but was cancelled at the last-minute due the illness of soprano Lillian Nordica in the role of Brünnhilde.

°⁸ As advertised in the *New York Times*, the ticket prices were as follows: grand tier boxes (seats 6), $50; stall boxes (seats 5), $30; stall boxes (seats 4), $25 and $20; orchestra and orchestra circle, $4; dress circle, $3; balcony (first three rows), $2.50; other rows, $2; family circle (first three rows), $1.50; other rows, $1. The Times also published a list of box-holders and subscribers, which included prominent members of society like the Roosevelts and Pierpont-Morgans; see article in 15 Jan 1898, 7.
Magdalene. Also making his American debut was the young German tenor Hans Breuer as Mime, a part for which he had been specially groomed by Julius Kneise and Cosima Wagner in 1896 for the Ring cycle at Bayreuth. More remarkable perhaps were the many non-German singers who were cast in the remaining principal roles; they were mostly American-born, and notably, not German-American. Lillian Nordica, the renowned American soprano from the East Coast, was Brünnhilde for all three operas of the trilogy. Another American soprano, Marie Barna, who hailed from San Francisco, played no fewer than three Wagnerian women: Brünnhilde (for Siegfried in Philadelphia), Sieglinde (in Boston and Chicago), and Gutrune. As well, a Canadian soprano, Florence Toronta (who named herself after her native city), had the part of Woglinde and was also the Forest Bird. Among the male singers, David Bispham, the famed baritone from Philadelphia, portrayed Alberich (a role he had last season with the Grau company resident at the Metropolitan), and Herr Rains, a youthful American bass, was Hunding and Fafner. These artists had trained in Italy and Germany, and they represented a new generation of singers in the United States who could interpret roles in multiple languages and operatic traditions.

As in previous seasons, critics writing about these performances of the Ring operas continued to focus on the singers and their portrayals of principal roles. Now that the cycle’s plot and music were more or less familiar to them and to many Americans, specific attention was paid to nuances of interpretation, in particular, when evaluating the quality of the singing and stage action. For example, William J. Henderson, for his New York Times review of a presentation of Die Walküre, wrote that Lillian Nordica’s otherwise excellent performance as Brünnhilde fell short in the “annunciation of death scene.” At this moment, he remarked quite astutely, that her characterization lacked the aggressive, asexual quality befitting her “godhood”: “She was womanly, but did not suggest the heroic nature of the Valkyr. She was Wotan’s daughter, but not the goddess. So throughout the drama she was sweet and winning, rather
He added that Nordica could have achieved the right effect by singing in broader lines and with more power. Such comments, significantly, would not have been typical in reviews of the performances that took place in the German seasons of the 1880s as Americans were being introduced to the opera.

Nordica was not the only soprano about whom critics desired a more dynamic interpretation of the part of Brünnhilde. The journalist of The North American felt that the ideal voice for the part of Brünnhilde required a certain weight and forcefulness, aspects which he found lacking in that of Marie Barna, who portrayed the Valkyrie in Siegfried in Philadelphia. As he wrote: “The Brunnhilde fell below the general high level of achievement. Mlle Barna was obviously too nervous to do herself justice, but her voice and method are so essentially lyrical that it is difficult to imagine her ever being effective in a heavy dramatic character.”

In his view, she was much better as Sieglinde, which she sang in a subsequent performance of Die Walküre. Johanna Gadski too was deemed a very eloquent Sieglinde, but was found wanting in the “heroic volume of tone” as Brünnhilde in the Chicago staging of Siegfried.

Of all the singers in the German troupe, however, it was Ernst Kraus who received the most criticism for his interpretation of Siegmund and both Siegfrieds. Henderson did not appreciate the way Kraus sang the part of Siegmund, finding it “thoroughly tiresome” in the way he “bawled the music in his customary manner, forcing his open lower tones in his most vicious style and indulging in guttural explosives.” Even more problematic was Kraus’s tendency to gesticulate wildly on stage, apparently without attention to the music or Wagner’s directions. As Henderson described, “in action too, [he] was distracting. He waved his arms about like a windmill, and he strutted with his nether limbs like a country circuit tragedian.” His young Siegfried, though sung with “abundant vigor”, was also acted “without method”; there was some improvement, however, in his performance as the hero for Götterdämmerung, because he used

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100 The North American, 7 Dec 1897, 8.
101 Chicago Daily Tribune, 19 Mar 1898, 5.
less movement and sang with more discretion.\textsuperscript{102} The \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} also reported that Kraus for the Chicago performances generally moved about the stage seemingly unprompted. The tenor was not the only problem in this matter; in general, there appeared to be a dearth of stage direction for these performances of the \textit{Ring} operas, and an apparent lack of understanding or attention to the relationship between the music and singer’s movements on stage. As Louis C. Elson described the Boston performance of \textit{Die Walküre}:

It had some faults, chiefly in the matter of action, for the singers rarely timed their movements so as to give sense of the guiding motives. Siegmund was gazing at the ground when the love-motive in the orchestra told that his first glance at Sieglinde had awakened affection; Sieglinde stood many feet away from Siegmund when the sympathy motive spoke of her anxiety as to whether he was alive or dead, and many similar points might be cited which would have infuriated Wagner.\textsuperscript{103}

If Wagner had seen these productions, he might have partly—if not solely—blamed the conductor for these issues; Damrosch should have been responsible for ensuring the integration of the stage action with the orchestral score. Not only did Damrosch appear to be unaware of this key principle in staging Wagner’s operas (and this is where he was clearly the lesser interpreter to Seidl), his rigid style of conducting, which several critics noted, did not help. Damrosch also frequently appeared unable to keep his orchestra from drowning out his singers on stage, many of whom, unfortunately, tried to compensate by “roaring” (as one critic put it), thus, adversely affecting vocal quality and intonation.

In spite of these issues, Americans, according to most critical accounts, continued to pack the theatres in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Chicago for the operas of the \textit{Ring}, expressing genuine attentiveness during the performances. Furthermore, they appeared to embrace Italian and German opera equally; even pro-Wagner critics rarely, if no longer, debated the merits of Wagner opera over French and Italian works. In fact, they now suggested that a broad appreciation of German, French, and Italian opera was an indication of progressive taste. This development suggests that Wagner’s \textit{Ring} dramas had also finally attained public

\textsuperscript{102} See reviews for \textit{New York Times}, 10 Feb 1898, 6; and 12 Feb 1898, 7.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Boston Daily Advertiser}, 26 Feb 1898, 1.
acceptance and its place in the core operatic repertory. As expressed by Henderson in the *New York Times*:

> It is a good sign of the condition of public taste that opera-goers have not forgotten how to enjoy the tremendously serious tragedies of Wagner during the seasons in which they have been listening to the more mellifluous works of Gounod and Meyerbeer and Massenet. It is an equally good evidence of catholic taste that the same public can enjoy its “Faust” and its “Aida”.

Even with the popularity and financial success of the 1897–1898 season, Damrosch announced in early April 1898 that he would withdraw from the management of his company. In part, he was exhausted from the frenetic pace of the past few years (one should remember he continued to conduct the New York Symphony and Oratorio Society while leading the Damrosch Opera Company), and he wanted time to rest, recuperate, and develop his skills as a composer. However, in his memoir, he expressed other reasons for his departure, notably, his personal frustrations with producing Wagner’s operas, especially the *Ring*, to the standard he desired. Specifically, he found that with the many variations and limitations in the available stage technology, creating the proper “illusion” for each performance was practically impossible. No doubt many an opera director of the *Ring* cycle, would have empathized with the following statement:

> Among the other reasons that impelled me finally to give up the opera was the realization how comparatively seldom absolute artistic perfection can be obtained at a stage performance…Still another problem was the question of stage illusion. I gave this a great deal of attention and study, and spent a great deal of money on scenery and lighting. I examined the best inventions in this direction in the opera houses of Germany and imported many of them. I was the first to bring over the very clever swimming-machines used in Dresden by the Rhine Maidens in “Rheingold.” But Wagner’s demands on the stage are so extraordinary that a real illusion is not often possible. His music excites the imagination and is often all sufficient. One can see the glorious flames crackling and burning around the sleeping *Brunhilde* [sic] when one hears an orchestra of a hundred playing the music of “Fire Charm,” but how seldom does a stage performance enhance this illusion! The *Brunhilde* may be too big and too fat, or the light of the flames may too clearly show that the scenery is but painted canvas and pasteboard after all, and our sophisticated eyes know only too well how the plumber’s steam-pipes convey the steam that is intended to simulate the smoke of the flames from the boiler in the cellar. It sometimes seemed to me, after striving in vain to carry out Wagner’s ideal of a union of all the arts in order to produce a new and perfect art form

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(the “music-drama”), as if this great genius had really committed a gigantic mistake, and as if the very artistic illusion and semblance of verity was destroyed by the scenic paraphernalia. Of course there were performances over which a happy star seemed to shine and which now and then gave us complete satisfaction and happiness. But the static quality of scenery became to me more and more a hindrance to an imagination ready to soar on the wings of the music.105

Moreover, that Damrosch’s Company was essentially an itinerant opera troupe, whose mobile scenery had to be adapted to the theatres they performed in, was a situation not conducive to producing with consistency the technical effects required to stage the Ring operas. In the end, Damrosch relinquished the future production of the Ring to Maurice Grau’s resident company at the Metropolitan Opera. As a conductor, however, his time with the Ring operas was not quite over yet.

The Charles A. Ellis Opera Company, 1898–1899

Following his announcement to withdraw from managing opera, Damrosch sold his share of the sets, costumes, and properties to his business partner, Charles A. Ellis, who took over the administration of the troupe. For one more season, Ellis decided to offer the same balance of operas in multiple languages and traditions that he and Damrosch had implemented the previous year. For all performances of the Wagner repertoire, Damrosch agreed to return to conduct the company, while Richard Fried led the rest of the German-language works, and Armando Seppilli the French and Italian operas. No New York season was scheduled, perhaps as a favor to Maurice Grau whose company had resumed its residency at the Metropolitan Opera. The Ring operas, as far as can be ascertained by newspaper reviews, were only performed in Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago.106 The first two cities received one “trilogy” each (minus Das Rheingold); in Chicago, only Siegfried was performed, as well as a single act

106 According to the New York Times on 8 Jan 1899, 6, Ellis planned an extensive spring tour for his company which included stops in Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Omaha, Kansas City, Minneapolis-St. Paul, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Louisville, Indianapolis, Detroit, Toledo, Columbus, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. Based on the limited number of extant newspaper reviews about the company’s activities, it appears that no Wagner operas were performed on this tour.
from *Die Walküre*.

For the new season, Ellis pared down the company to one-hundred members including the orchestra, which was still comprised of members of the New York Symphony. The casts for the *Ring* operas consisted predominantly of singers familiar to Americans from previous seasons, including Ernst Kraus (Siegmund, Siegfried), Herr Rains (Hunding, Fafner), Florence Toronta (Forest Bird, Woglinde), Gerhard Stehmann (The Wanderer), and Marie Brandis as Gutrune. The role of Brünhilde was divided among several sopranos: Marie Brema, the English soprano from the 1895 Damrosch season, for *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung* in Boston and Chicago; Milka Ternina for the Philadelphia performances of *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*; and Johanna Gadski, for the Boston and Chicago performances of *Siegfried* (she also reprised her principal role of Sieglinde). Among the few newcomers, the German tenor Kissling took over the part of Mime, and baritone Max Stury portrayed Alberich and Gunther. Polish-born soprano, Rose Olitzka, a favorite at London’s Covent Garden, assumed the mezzo-soprano roles of Fricka and Flosshilde. To provide stage direction, Ellis hired George Egener, who had reportedly worked closely with Anton Seidl during the German opera seasons at the Metropolitan Opera House. Egener’s involvement, especially with the *Ring* operas, promised an improvement from the sloppy staging of the previous seasons; as was anticipated in *The North American*, “Under the eye of Herr Egener, we may expect both adequate and authoritative management in the stage department, and with complete stage resources at his command, the trilogy should be presented in a manner satisfying to the most acute critic of these operas.”

Reviews of the Ellis company’s *Ring* performances highlighted many of the same issues discussed in prior seasons concerning the Damrosch troupe’s presentations. Vocal quality continued to be a common topic, especially among critics who yearned to hear greater lyricism.

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107 Ternina became indisposed for her performances and she was replaced by Johanna Gadski for *Die Walküre* (Marie Brandis, in turn, replaced her as Sieglinde), and by Lillian Nordica for *Götterdämmerung.*

from the singers performing. Stury, in particular, was criticized for “over-declamation”, and Kraus
was, at times, prone to shouting his lines rather than singing. Contributing to this problem was
the orchestra’s relatively large size of seventy members, whose considerable volume Damrosch
struggled to control as he had no sunken pit to aid him (they were still rarely used in theatres at
the time). Kraus’s strange movements on stage, this time, for his portrayal of Siegfried, was
once again met with disapproval; according to the Chicago Daily Tribune, the tenor evoked the
manner of a “self-complacent air of a man of the world”, when he “step[ped] into a dragon cave
as though he were a swell entering a ballroom”, rather than as an impulsive, untaught, naive
youth. Only in his duet with Brünhilde, did he forget himself and assume the appropriate
characterization. Otherwise, the rest of the singers were generally praised for their efforts, with
Marie Brema’s portrayal of Brünhilde receiving greatest commendation.

The various abridgements to the operas for these performance interested Louis C. Elson
and the Chicago critic, who wished to point out to Americans that the “Bayreuth ideal” of
complete performances of the Ring had yet to take hold in the U.S. Americans were by now well
accustomed to seeing Siegfried with the “riddle scene” between The Wanderer and Mime
shortened from three questions to one, and Siegfried’s encounter with The Wanderer
completely abolished. (Curiously, the Wanderer’s scene with Erda, which had been performed
during the Damrosch seasons, was omitted in the presentations of the Ellis company.)
Götterdämmerung, as usual, remained substantially abridged. As Elson pointed out, complete,
uncut presentations of the cycle would only be possible if the performances started at four in the
afternoon as in Bayreuth, and incorporated long intervals between the acts so one could eat
dinner. Such a schedule, of course, was unfeasible for most working Americans, thus throwing
into sharp relief the social practicalities that continued to affect the performance and reception of
the Ring outside of the extraordinary setting of the Bayreuth Festival.

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With the close of the 1898–1899 season, Damrosch’s remarkable endeavor to revive Wagner’s operas, especially the *Ring*, on U.S. soil came to an end. Ellis did not maintain the company, and returned instead to Boston to continue management of the city’s Symphony Orchestra, and to provide representation for various star singers. As is made evident by the preceding investigation, the Damrosch company was undoubtedly the most significant German opera troupe of the 1890s, responsible for bringing the operas of the *Ring* cycle to thousands of Americans, not just in the main urban centers but also in smaller U.S. cities. In this sense, Damrosch outdid the resident companies of the Metropolitan Opera House, and furthermore, as George Martin rightly argues, “demonstrated to the unbelieving directors and managers of the Metropolitan the size of the audience [for Wagner] they were ignoring.” Importantly, Damrosch’s initiative helped to admit Wagner’s music-dramas, including the *Ring*, into a larger, more inclusive performance repertory of operatic works, consisting of Italian, French, and German-language works in a single season. This soon became the main method of American opera programming and performance, an approach which is still used today.\(^{110}\)

**Part II: The Ring Cycle in Fin-de-siècle America: Performance and Reception**

*New Productions of Die Walküre and Siegfried at the Metropolitan Opera, 1895–1897*

To recapitulate what happened at the Metropolitan Opera between 1891 and 1895, the resident opera company of Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau performed mostly Italian and French grand opera at the directive of the house’s board and stockholders. Wagner’s works were not entirely abandoned, but only *Lohengrin, Die Meistersinger*, and *Die fliegende Holländer* were performed during this period, and usually in Italian translation. However, American interest in German-language opera, and notably, in Wagner’s later works such as the *Ring*, had evidently not waned, as Walter Damrosch and his opera company proved. The success of Damrosch’s

\(^{110}\) George Martin describes this as the “wing” method of producing opera, whereby there were separate Italian, French, and German “wings” within a company that specialized in the repertoire of each language; see *The Damrosch Dynasty*, 151.
endeavor likely prompted Abbey and Grau to reconsider their programming for the 1895–1896 and 1896–1897 seasons, and decide to bring back the composer’s later operas into the repertory, with Anton Seidl as conductor. A successful revival of Tristan und Isolde was achieved in 1895, while from the Ring cycle they tested the waters with a new production of Die Walküre, which received two performances in 1896. However, attendance was very low, unlike for Tristan, and also nowhere near the numbers that were at the Damrosch presentations. Furthermore, newspaper reviews reported that, despite Seidl’s excellent conducting and fine playing from the orchestra, the staging was otherwise poorly executed, and the singing, done mostly in a strict declamatory style, was found to be unappealing.

Not to be deterred by this result, Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau mounted a new production of Siegfried for twelve performances in the following season (seven in New York, and five on tour). Perhaps because they were in competition with the Damrosch company, these presentations appeared to be given at a higher standard. According to contemporary reports, they were more extensively rehearsed (in fact, the first performance had been postponed to allow more time for preparation), and greater attention was paid to the management of the scenic effects. The Metropolitan Opera’s stage director William Parry was responsible for the latter, his credibility advanced by the mention that he had been expressly sent to Bayreuth for the 1896 Festival in order to see Siegfried and “produce it here as near possible to the perfect performance witnessed there.” But to American critics, the greatest improvement came from the various personnel changes that placed many non-German singers in the main roles, including the Polish-born brothers Jean de Reszke (1850–1925), a tenor, who portrayed the young hero, and Edouard de Reszke (1853–1917), a bass-baritone, in the part of The Wanderer. The lyrical singing style of the brothers, developed from their training and experience

112 See New York Times, 10 Jan 1896, 4; and 17 Jan 1896, 4.
113 See New York Times, 3 Jan 1897, 11.
in Italian and French opera and adapted to their Wagner performances, was no less than a revelation to the critic of the *New York Times*, William J. Henderson. Compared to the “bark” of German singers Max Alvary and Albert Niemann, Henderson found that Jean’s performance as Siegfried demonstrated that the part was singable from beginning to end, and “all the more beautiful when sung in Italian and French style” as long as it was in sympathy with Wagner’s purposes, with the text clearly articulated and the singer’s stage gestures on stage natural.\footnote{See Henderson’s review for the *New York Times*, 31 Dec 1896, 5.}

Jean de Reszke was one of several singers who came to represent a new generation of artists at the Metropolitan who could sing operas in the original language of composition, and whose voices could sing flexibly in multiple national styles, or even blend their best aspects, such as lyrical singing with excellent acting skills. According to Henry T. Finck, it was working with Anton Seidl that had inspired de Reszke to study the main Wagner tenor roles (i.e. Walther, Lohengrin, Tristan, Siegfried, Siegmund) so he could perform them exclusively with the conductor. Seidl, too, found an ideal Wagnerian singer in de Reszke, despite him being non-German; as he mused in his article “On Conducting”:

> The German singers of today have no idea how much they mislead and bore people when they persist in singing “straight from the shoulder,” as is their favorite fashion. Unless the conductor wisely interferes here the notion—not altogether false—that the Germans do not know how to sing will take long-enduring root to the great injury of the German dramatic art. I have often heard the statement made by foreign singers, as a demonstrated fact, that the German artists are artists in feeling indeed, and serious in their devotion, but that their singing is crude. I am almost forced to agree to this view. On the other hand, I have heard from a German colleague of Jean de Reszke derogatory remarks concerning that tenor. I give the assurance that there was much for the German to learn from the great Jean, especially his wonderful art of phrasing and his tasteful declamation. The criticism of his colleague only proved that he had no ear for phrasing.\footnote{See Henry T. Finck, *Anton Seidl: A Memorial by his Friends* (New York: C. Scribner’s and Sons, 1899; repr. 1983), 221–22.}

Across the Atlantic, de Reszke’s reputation as a Wagnerian singer had also reached Cosima Wagner who wanted to cast him and his brother Edouard for the 1896 *Ring* but in the end, to
her great regret, she was unable to secure them.\footnote{Cosima appeared to have heard about the success of the Metropolitan’s revival of \textit{Tristan und Isolde} which starred both de Reszke brothers (Jean as Tristan and Edouard as King Marke). As she wrote to Seidl: “Your \textit{Tristan} performance must have been very fine, and I wish I could hear it again sung beautifully...Did Jean de Reszke tell you he studied the part of Tristan with [Julius] Kneise? I am dreadfully sorry not to be able to have these two great artists, Jean and Edouard, with me. I have done all I could to secure them.” See her letter to the conductor, dated 6 June 1896, reprinted in op. cit., 199–200.} According to Henderson, however, the siblings apparently had no intention to sing at Bayreuth, about which he explained bluntly: “They are perfectly familiar with the conditions which prevail there, and they do not find themselves at all in sympathy with the autocratic, inconsistent, and irrational Frau Cosima.”\footnote{\textit{New York Times}, 10 Jan 1897, SM2.} Here, Henderson is referencing the rather rigid, even pedantic, directorial style of the composer’s widow of productions at the Bayreuth Festival, which tended to prioritize absolute clarity of the text above the interpretation of the orchestral score.

During the 1896–1897 season, de Reszke’s talents as the young Siegfried did help to draw bigger audiences to the Metropolitan to see the opera, as well as when it was performed on tour in Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Boston. Inevitably, the critics of these cities’ papers compared the company’s presentations of the work to those given by the Damrosch troupe.\footnote{See \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 13 Mar 1897, 5; 21 Mar 1897, 1; \textit{St. Louis Post Dispatch}, 26 Mar 1897, 4; \textit{Cincinnati Enquirer}, 31 Mar 1897, 5; and \textit{Boston Daily Advertiser}, 6 Apr 1897, 1.} On the whole, the Metropolitan company’s stagings were considered to be less smooth, hampered by errors in the management of various effects. On the other hand, Seidl’s authoritative, more elastic interpretation of the score was preferred to Damrosch’s, even though Seidl’s ensemble was slightly smaller than the latter’s. Most of the music of The Wanderer that was usually cut in other performances was retained, in order to feature Edouard de Reszke as much as possible. Not all reviewers though preferred Jean de Reszke’s interpretation of the part of Siegfried. The writer for the \textit{Boston Daily Advertiser} stated he actually preferred the raw, explosive performance of the Damrosch Company’s Ernst Kraus than the more refined portrayal of de Reszke, although he admitted that the latter did sing very well, especially in showing the “vocal possibilities” of the part. Similarly, the \textit{St. Louis Post-Dispatch}’s critic wondered if de
Reszke’s rendering was perhaps too polished:

[H]e rises above his predecessors in clarity of enunciation, smoothness of phrasing and truthful intonation. But the voice—Siegfried’s voice, the rude, loud blare of the iron-throated forest boy—that is what we missed in Jean de Reszke’s interpretation. His “sword song” was like a whisper to the ringing notes of Kraus or Alvary.

With the death of Abbey in October 1896, and Schoeffel’s departure to Boston, the end of the 1896–1897 season necessitated a change in management. While little is known about the financial position of the company between 1891 and 1897, there is evidence that it did suffer substantial losses, partly as a result of their temporary abandonment of the Wagner repertory, and competition with the Damrosch troupe.\textsuperscript{119} Maurice Grau, who was left to oversee the operations of the company, was offered the lease at the Metropolitan for the 1897–1898 season but he declined, choosing instead to spend the year to rebuild the company in preparation for the 1898–1899 season. In the meantime, he allowed the Damrosch-Ellis company to use the theatre, for what turned out to be the troupe’s final season with Damrosch as its manager.\textsuperscript{120}

When the Maurice Grau Opera Company resumed residency at the Metropolitan in November 1898, it was an organization primed to lead the way for operatic performance in the U.S. into the twentieth century.

\textit{The Maurice Grau Opera Company at the Metropolitan Opera House, 1898–1903}

During the five seasons between 1898 and 1903 it was resident at the Metropolitan Opera the Maurice Grau Opera Company helped to solidify the national and international reputation of the house, and established the practices that eventually helped to define opera administration in the United States for the next century and to the present day. Employing the “wing system” adopted by Damrosch and Ellis, Grau hired large rosters of artists who could

\textsuperscript{119} According to Eisler, William Steinway had already stepped in as the head of management in 1896 in order to absorb the company’s debts accrued from previous seasons, and to issue stock and notes to its creditors. For more about the financial situation of the Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau company, see Eisler’s \textit{The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1908} (Croton-on-Hudson, NY: North River Press Inc., 1984), 210.

\textsuperscript{120} Grau’s decision was due in part from his inability to hire many of the artists who had performed previously at the Metropolitan, such as Emma Eames and Nellie Melba, since they were already engaged by the Damrosch-Ellis Company. He also wanted the year off to fulfill his managerial obligations at London’s Covent Garden. Op. cit., 211.
perform a broad repertoire of French, Italian, and German operas in a single season. Each of the works programmed were presented in the original language of composition, and rarely in translation. Among the other significant accomplishments of the Grau company was the extension of the opera season: at the time, the 1898–1899 season, which went from November 29 to March 26, was the longest to date, but by the early twentieth century, a single season often stretched from mid-November to late April. Naturally, this meant there was an overall increase in the number of performances per season; for example, the 1900–1901 season featured 82 performances of 29 different operas, which increased to 91 presentations of 33 different operas in 1902–1903. The Grau company also undertook some of the longest American tours ever completed by an opera troupe; over five seasons, it traveled to no less than 37 different cities in the United States and Canada. The longest of these took place between October and December 1902, when the company gave 140 performances in 26 cities, including Montreal and Toronto in Canada, and several cities in the southern U.S., including Nashville, Memphis, Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, Houston, and San Antonio. Until then, these cities had never been visited by a troupe from the Metropolitan Opera. Financially, these tours were very successful, and in many cases, earned more profit than during the regular season.

With the extension of the season was a parallel expansion of the performing repertory. Besides presenting familiar French and Italian works, the Grau company revived several Mozart operas, as well as introduced new works by Puccini, including the Metropolitan premiere of *La bohème* and the American premiere of *Tosca*. To perform all these operas, Grau had his pick of many world-renowned artists who could sing the repertoire to a high standard as well as draw audiences to the performances. Having so many star singers on his roster must have been exorbitantly expensive, but that Grau still managed to make a significant profit over five seasons.

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121 For a general overview of the Grau company’s performances, see Chapter 6 in Eisler, *The Metropolitan Opera*, and Chapter 5 in Kolodin (1936).
is a testament to his excellent skills as a manager and a promoter. Unfortunately, with singers being the primary investment, less attention was given to the other elements of the productions themselves and thus, the scenery was sometimes criticized for being poorly made, the stage management slovenly, and the performances of the orchestra second-rate.

Importantly, Grau reinstated all of Wagner’s operas introduced during the German seasons back into the Metropolitan repertory. While multi-lingual casts were used on occasion for some of them, most performances were in the original German language. Among them, *Lohengrin* received the most presentations, and in general, Wagnerian productions comprised a substantial proportion—usually around a third—of the total number of opera performances given each season between 1898 and 1903. The Grau company also gave the first uncut presentation of the complete *Ring* cycle in the U.S., which helped to further establish the Metropolitan Opera House as the premier American opera theatre.

**The Ring Cycle in the United States, 1898–1903**

*Performances*

For the first time in its American performance history, the *Ring* cycle was staged in its unabridged version at the Metropolitan Opera House over two weeks in January 1899. It was subsequently given two more complete performances in February and March, and three more in the following season, once in Philadelphia and twice in New York in early 1900. The presentations were scheduled on alternating Thursdays and Tuesdays, and to accommodate the full length of each opera, they started earlier in the evening than usual: *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* at 7 pm and *Götterdämmerung* at 6:45 pm (for the matinee presentations, *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* began at 1 pm and *Götterdämmerung* at 12:45 pm). A twenty-minute intermission was inserted between each act of the operas. *Das Rheingold* began at its usual start time of 8

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122 According to Eisler, the financial results for Grau Opera Company are not available but the executor of Grau’s estate had told Irving Kolodin that Grau had left over $600,000, most of which was accrued from his production of opera between 1898 and 1903; see Eisler, 245, and Kolodin (1936), 89.
pm or 8:30 pm, but for the first time, the entire opera was performed without a break (that is, without the intermission that occurred between the second and third scenes in previous seasons.) As a group, these uncut cycles were treated as a special event within the company’s season, in that they were not part of the regular subscription series, although tickets were first offered to subscribers, then to non-subscribers. For the two New York cycles in 1900, tickets had to be purchased exclusively for the entire cycle of performances and were set at the following prices: Grand Tier boxes, $240.00; stall boxes, $120.00 and $100.00; orchestra stalls, $20.00; dress circle, $12.00; balcony (front row), $10.00; balcony (back row), $8.00; and family circle, $6.00 (see Figure 7.1). (By comparison, a $20 orchestra stall ticket was equivalent to the price of a complete cycle at Bayreuth in 1896.) Any remaining seats not sold under this scheme were then divided into individual tickets, which were offered to the public at the same rates as for an opera in the regular season.

Even though the Grau company travelled more widely in the U.S. and Canada than any previous troupe, the Ring operas were, in fact, brought to fewer places than the Stanton company during the German seasons and the Damrosch company in the 1890s. Aside from New York, only Philadelphia (in January 1900 and January 1903) and Chicago (in April 1902) received presentations of the full cycle, as did San Francisco, where it was performed in that city for the first time in November 1900. In 1903, Bostonians and Chicagoans saw the “trilogy” minus Das Rheingold. Otherwise, the company gave mostly single performances of Die Walküre on their extensive tours in the 1899–1900 and 1901–1902 seasons, and of Siegfried in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh at the end of the 1902–1903 season. It is likely that Grau decided to tour with the complete Ring cycle only sparingly because he thought it was not economical or artistically satisfying to perform it using makeshift sets or sub-par stage technology.

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123 Ticket prices obtained from an advertisement for the Ring cycle printed in a Metropolitan Opera program booklet from the 1899–1900, held at the Metropolitan Opera Archives, New York.
124 This corrects Eisler’s earlier assertion that one of Grau’s significant achievements was he brought the complete uncut Ring cycle to more Americans and U.S. cities than any other company before.
Der Ring des Nibelungen

...BY...

RICHARD WAGNER.

THE three cycle performances of DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN which were given last year at the Metropolitan Opera House, when Wagner's master-works were heard for the first time in this country in their entirety, proved so successful that the Management have made arrangements to give during the present season

TWO CYCLES OF THE ABOVE WORK

under the same conditions which made the performances of last year a memorable feature of the opera season. The ensemble and the productions will follow as closely as possible the admirable model; no effort will be spared to bring the three acts of each section to a finish before the change of each section is reached. The evening performances of "DIE WALKÜRE" and "SIEGFRIED" will commence at 7 o'clock, "GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG" at 4:45 o'clock. The afternoon performances of "DIE WALKÜRE" and "SIEGFRIED" will commence at 1 o'clock; "GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG" at 1:45 o'clock. "Das Rheingold," being a short section, the evening performances will commence until 3 p.m., the afternoon performance will commence at 2:30 p.m., terminating at 4 o'clock.

SCENERY...It will be remembered that the scenery proved a special feature of last year's performances. Important additions and alterations have been made to this department, and the opera will be mounted in lavish style and in accordance with the best traditions observed at Bayreuth.

PUNCTUALITY...Each act will commence promptly at the time mentioned on the printed list, and the greatest punctuality is insisted upon. Visitors are respectfully requested to arrive in their seats at least five minutes in advance of the actual commence.

PRICES...Although the prices have been raised considerably, there will be no increase in prices. Subscribers to all the performances of the regular season of opera may retain their seats for either series by notifying the Subscription Department not later than Monday, February 3, 12 P.M. Subscribers to single performances will receive preferential treatment after the first admission is made.

The sale of season tickets (to non-subscribers) for either series will begin Wednesday, January 27, and continue until Saturday evening, P.M.

PRICES FOR EACH CHORE.

Grand Tier Boxes..........................$240.00
Stall Boxes................................$120.00 and 100.00
Orchestra Stalls...........................20.00
Dress Circle................................12.00
Balcony (Front Row).........................8.00
Balcony (Back Row)........................6.00
Family Circle..............................4.00

...THE FOLLOWING ARTISTS WILL APPEAR...

...Das Rheingold...

Nem. Wagn., WAGNER, ROY, R. G., MEYER, W., MEYER-ROTH, C.
Sieg., SIEGBRANDT, M.
Albrecht, BLOOM, C.
Thrain, SCHÜTZ, E.
Thrain, HEISS, E.
Fafnir, LÜERS, W.
Fafnir, KÖRNER, W.
Fafnir, SCHMIDT, H.
Valhall, SCHULZ, R.
Woglinde, EISEN, H.
Woglinde, KÖRNER, W.
Flemish, EISEN, H.

...Das Rheingold...

Tuesday Evening, February 20.
Afternoon Performance to commence at 8:30 and resume at 11.
THERE WILL BE NO INTERMISSION.

...Die Walküre...

Thursday Evening, February 22.
Tuesday, Afternoon, March 6.
Evening Performance to commence at 8:30 and resume at 11.
Afternoon Performance to commence at 3:30 and 4:30 at 1.

...Siegfried...

Thursday Evening, March 27.
Evening Performance to commence at 8:30 and resume at 11.
Afternoon Performance to commence at 12:30 and resume at 1:30.

...Götterdämmerung...

Thursday Evening, March 27.
Evening Performance to commence at 8:30 and resume at 11.
Afternoon Performance to commence at 1:30 and resume at 2:30.

...Götterdämmerung...

Monday, Afternoon, March 27.
Evening Performance to commence at 8:30 and resume at 11.
Afternoon Performance to commence at 12:30 and resume at 1:30.

CONCERTS...

Wagner, SCHOLZ, R.
 fries, KÖRNER, W.
Valentin, EISEN, H.
Woglinde, EISEN, H.
Flemish, EISEN, H.

Figure 7.1. Metropolitan Opera Program Book Advertisement for the uncut Ring cycle, 1899.
Despite having presented an uncut *Ring* cycle in 1899, the Grau company still gave the individual operas in their more familiar abridged forms. After 1900, the shorter versions of *Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung* were reinstated, even for subsequent performances of complete cycles; the custom of an uncut *Ring* did not return to the Metropolitan Opera until 1929.  

Whether or not cuts should be employed to the cycle’s operas was a subject of debate among American critics at this time. While they acknowledged that faithful Wagnerites hated to see the operas of the cycle compressed because they felt the cuts violated the composer’s intentions (even though he did sanction them for performances outside of Bayreuth), the journalists tended to agree that it was not necessary to give the entire work unabridged. As the critic for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* commented, only “rabid” Wagnerites would want to see the complete work but a “less zealous and more discriminating admirer of Wagner’s genius” would admit that the uncut version is only good for festival presentations. The shorter versions were much more effective, he noted, and were less of a deterrent, since they helped to “enhance the good opinion the public forms of the master and his creations.”

Henderson of the *New York Times* too was in favor of the cuts, for he found the repetitions of stories and the music in the operas tedious and unnecessary, *especially* when the operas were given in succession as in a full cycle. On the other hand, he also admitted that the endeavor to provide a complete version was nevertheless “a worthy undertaking, for only so can this creation of a singular genius be rightly appreciated, and Mr. Grau’s company contains enough of the real Baireuth aggregation to give the whole thing an air of genuineness.”

The cuts for the *Ring* operas, however, were not uniformly applied to all the American performances. Depending on which singer was performing a particular role, certain scenes—or parts of scenes—were maintained, in order to feature these particular artists as fully as

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125 Kolodin (1966), 146.
126 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 Apr 1902, 7.
possible. For example, in an April 1902 performance of *Siegfried* in Chicago, the riddle scene between the Wanderer and Mime, normally shortened from three questions to one, was entirely preserved for Anton Van Rooy and Albert Reiss; also, the scene between The Wanderer and Erda was also retained, so the audience would have the full benefit of Ernestine Schumann-Heink’s interpretation. Otherwise, the opera was performed with other cuts throughout, notably, in the scenes between Mime and Siegfried in Act I, Siegfried’s forging of the sword, the conversations between The Wanderer and Alberich in Act II, and The Wanderer and Siegfried in Act III, as well as the final love duet. Occasionally, a performance suffered from too many abridgements as a result of the indisposition of several singers: besides the commonly employed cuts (e.g. the Norns scene), the company’s staging of *Götterdämmerung* in Boston in early April 1903 did not have a Waltraute, nor an Alberich, and the scene between Siegfried and the Rhinedaughters, was also omitted. Not surprisingly, the *Boston Globe*’s reporter commented that this was one of the least satisfactory presentations ever given of opera.

*Singers*

Grau’s company achieved a particular distinction during its five-year tenure at the Metropolitan Opera for its large composite of world-renowned artists. To be sure, the relative financial and artistic success of the *Ring* productions of this period was, in part, due to his hiring of many notable Wagnerian singers of the late nineteenth century. Some were already familiar to Americans from the Metropolitan’s German seasons and from the Damrosch troupe’s performances, while others were relatively new to the U.S. but had performed in recent Bayreuth Festivals, where Americans were in attendance. However, unlike the Stanton company of the 1880s, Grau’s roster was not comprised exclusively of German-born or –trained singers; instead, it included notable interpreters of the cycle’s major roles from other European countries and the U.S. Along with the Polish de Reszke brothers, there were also the bass-baritone Anton Van Rooy (1870–1932) and tenor Ernest Van Dyck (1861–1923), both Belgian;
the Swedish bass Johannes Elmblad (1853–1910), the Croatian soprano Milka Ternina (1863–1941), and the Americans, Lillian Nordica (1857–1914), Emma Eames (1865–1952), and David Bispham (1857–1921). Among the Germans to return were star sopranos Lilli Lehmann and Marie Brema to portray Brünnhilde, as well as Johanna Gadski as Sieglinde. For the rest of the parts, Grau hired several other Austro-German singers who had recently performed in the 1896 Bayreuth Ring to reprise their roles at the Metropolitan, including: Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861–1936) as Erda and Waltraute; Alois Burgstaller (1872–1945) as Siegfried; Hans Breuer (1868–1929) as Mime; Fritz Friedrichs (dates unknown) as Alberich; and Luise Reuss-Belce (1860–1945) as Gutrune. Evidently, the transatlantic connection between Bayreuth and New York continued to be vital to the American performance history of the Ring cycle at the turn of the twentieth century, though with one important difference: there was now an international dimension to the casts, for no longer were German singers the only—or the best—interpreters of Wagner opera.

With the Ring cycle no longer considered by many Americans to be a complete novelty, reviews concerning the performances of the Grau period shifted from discussions of the plot and musical exegeses of motives, towards evaluating singers’ voice quality and the subtleties of interpretation of the main roles. As a whole, the casts for these performances were strong, with several stand-out performers. Americans had the rare treat of seeing Lillian Nordica as Brünnhilde for entire cycles (typically, the role was divided between two, sometimes three sopranos), and Milka Ternina also received consistent praise for her portrayal of the Valkyrie. As far as could be gleaned from the reviews, critics desired an intelligent performance of the character that took into account the transformation of Brünnhilde from the “unfeeling maid” in

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129 For full details on the singers and their roles for the Grau company’s Ring performances, consult Fitzgerald et al, Annals of the Metropolitan Opera.

130 As David Breckbill has pointed out, the focus of discussion on singers’ abilities and interpretation of roles was also a key feature of the various reviews about the Bayreuth performances between 1886 and 1906 under Cosima Wagner’s direction. See the articles by Richard Pohl, Arthur Seidl, Eugen Gura, Arnold Schering, and Heinrich Chevalley, translated by Mary A. Cicora and introduced and annotated by Breckbill in “Cosima Wagner’s Bayreuth,” in Richard Wagner and His World, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 435–75.
Die Walküre, as the Chicago reporter described her, to the embodiment of “womanliness” in Götterdämmerung, “having learned sympathy, pity, and self-sacrificing devotion.” Yet, even the “unfeeling maid” of Die Walküre should not be without emotion or passion, as the New York Times critic criticized Swiss soprano Lucienne Breval’s (1869–1935) interpretation of being: “We [New Yorkers] cannot accept a phlegmatic, statuesque, saturnine Brünnhilde in lieu of the divinely passionate goddesses who have trod our stage.”

For the part of Sieglinde, Johanna Gadski was the favorite, but Ternina also impressed as a “lovely woman of brave yet tender nature”, as did Eames. According to the Chicago reviewer, Eames’s interpretation was richer than Gadski’s in the way she displayed her “ardent love” to Siegmund. Whereas Gadski’s was more openly passionate, Eames’s was more subtle, which in his opinion, was due to differences in national character: “She [Eames] seems to be the highest embodiment of American musical art, which is naturally colder and more statuesque than the corresponding German art.” (By comparison, Lehmann’s Sieglinde was the least favored, because it was found to be “too heroic” in conception.) Among the other female singers, Ernestine Schumann-Heink was highly praised as Fricka, Erda, and Waltraute; indeed, some portions of the operas regularly cut in previous performances were retained for her. That she also took on the parts of Flosshilde and the First Norn further indicates the range of her abilities but this irked some of the critics, who found her appearance as five different characters disturbed the overall illusion of the drama.

Reviewers had somewhat more to say about the various male singers as many were new to Americans in the major roles of the Ring. The bass-baritone Anton Van Rooy, despite his young age, received the most acclaim as the world-weary Wotan, a role in which he had made his career debut just two years earlier in the 1897 performances of the Ring cycle at Bayreuth.

131 Chicago Daily Tribune, 13 Apr 1902, 8.
132 New York Times, 28 Feb 1902, 9. The critic seemed quite disappointed by Breval (1869–1935), who had earned some renown in that same role at the Paris Opera.
133 Chicago Daily Tribune, 19 Nov 1898, 4.
Most impressive to the American critics was the immense breadth and power of his voice, as well as his clear declamation. Together with Schumann-Heink as Fricka, they renewed interest in the second scene of Act II Die Walküre, which they performed completely (it was usually shortened in previous performances). The other Belgian, Ernest Van Dyck, appeared as a satisfactory Siegmund but it was his colorful interpretation of Loge in Das Rheingold that earned him significant praise. Only the Chicago Daily Tribune dissented somewhat from this prevailing opinion, as he found Van Dyck’s depiction of the fiery demi-good too much the jolly and playful comedian, rather than exuding nervous, volatile energy. Andreas Dippel, who portrayed Siegmund and Siegfried, received more mixed reviews. Frequently, he struggled to make his voice heard (the critics cited that he was not a large man and needed a bigger voice to fill the large auditoriums of American theatres) but his excellent acting did help convey, for the character of Siegfried, a sense of “youthful buoyancy…and freshness of feeling.”

In the same roles of Loge and Seigfried, which they shared in the 1902–1903 season, Georg Anthes and Alois Burgstaller appeared to be on opposite poles. Anthes (who also sang Loge in 1903) was mediocre as a singer; he was frequently off pitch, and appeared to lack understanding of phrasing. As Siegfried he was both over-exuberant and too studied in his gestures to be dramatically effective, such as in the awakening of Brünnhilde which, according to the Times, came across awkwardly and with no sense of the “ecstasy of the situation”. On the other hand, Burgstaller was a “delightful surprise”, quipped W.L. Hubbard of the Chicago Tribune, and “his acting containing many significant and illuminative details that bore witness to the care and intelligence with which he had studied the part.” In Boston, the Globe’s critic thought Burgstaller’s was the best Siegfried heard in the city, especially for “the rich quality of

135 New York Times, 20 Jan 1903, 9. See also New York Times, 15 Jan 1903, 9; 17 Jan 1903, 9; 24 Jan 1903, 9. Anthes (1863–1923) came from the Dresden Opera, where he was the leading tenor.
136 See the following reviews in the Chicago Daily Tribune, all signed by Hubbard: 9 Apr 1903, 5; 16 Apr 1903, 7; and 19 Apr 1903, 7.
his voice, his power of sustaining fortissimo work true to the pitch and the varying expression
and dramatic effect given to all his music." That American critics found themselves pleasantly
surprised by Burgstaller's performances is worth noting, for he challenged their predominantly
negative opinions about the Bayreuth Festival performances then under Cosima Wagner's
direction. They had taken especial issue with the emphatic, declamatory style of singing, central
to Cosima's principle to make the text as clear as possible to the audience. As the critic of the
Chicago Daily Tribune explained it to his readers:

In the desire to make every line, every word, every syllable of the text have a
significance as vast as it is unsuspected by the average mortal, the directors of the "The
Temple" have brought about a style of musical declamation that consists of a series of
vocal explosions, some more terrific than others, but every one an explosion. At first this
style does impress the hearer, but soon it tires both ear and mind, and the monotony
that the Bayreuth school wished so earnestly to avoid is the result.  

Hans Breuer, another veteran of "Cosima's Bayreuth", also challenged critics’
expectations, in his eloquent interpretation of the evil dwarf Mime for the uncut cycles at the
Metropolitan Opera in 1900. However, other singers of the "Bayreuth school" came under strong
criticism, such as Fritz Friedrich as Alberich, who, according to Henderson of the Times, could
declaim well, but could not sing the music lyrically or act effectively. Similarly, Luise Reuss-
Belce who was seen in multiple parts over the seasons (as Brünnhilde, Sieglinde, Fricka, and
Gutrune) was found to be an adequate actress but her singing style was less desirable, or as
the Times critic put it underhandedly, "showed that she, too, had been at Baireuth, and that she
knew the goings in and the comings out as whispered at Wahnfried." Even Van Rooy's
otherwise successful Wotan was received with some ambivalence; as Henderson remarked:
"The nature of his interpretation of Wotan his well known, and it was carefully displayed. It is an
effective study, based on lines approved at Baireuth, but still open to critical discussion." Yet
curiously, despite their frustrations, the critics did not venture to suggest that perhaps American

137 Boston Globe, 2 Apr 1903, 7.
138 Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 Apr 1902, 5.
opera companies presenting the *Ring* could—or even *should*—stop hiring Bayreuth-trained artists, let alone seek alternatives to the Bayreuth model. As one American critic reluctantly acknowledged, even “with all its modern shortcomings, [Bayreuth] is still the fountain head of Wagnerism.”

**Conductors**

One could probably assume with good certainty that if it had been possible, Maurice Grau would have engaged Anton Seidl as the primary conductor for the Wagner repertory (especially the uncut *Ring* cycle) that his company would perform during the 1898–1899 season. Unfortunately, Seidl passed away suddenly in late March 1898, only months before the start of the season, and Grau was faced with the challenging task of finding a music director with the kind of experience and depth of understanding of Wagner’s scores that Seidl had had. In the end, Grau employed four different conductors for these works during his troupe’s five-year tenure at the Metropolitan. The first of these (and the one to lead the first uncut version of the *Ring*) was Franz Schalk (1863–1931), an Austrian who, two years later, would assume the conductorship at the Vienna Hofoper under Gustav Mahler’s directorship. As far as the reviews indicated, Schalk fared quite well for the *Ring* dramas, leading the performances with skill and precision, but otherwise lacked the flexibility and insight that characterized Seidl’s performances. Concerning a performance of *Die Walküre*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*’s critic pointed out Schalk’s rather staid interpretation of the score: “He seems often so devoid of enthusiasm as to become listless; apparently he is so afraid of undue measures [i.e. modifications in dynamics and tempi] that he does not even pay strict attention to the instructions of the composer.” Schalk’s conducting seemed to have improved a few months later in a New York performance of *Siegfried*, when he “gave more life to the tempi in the first

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141 The papers at the time reported that Seidl died as a result of food poisoning but an autopsy later showed he had severe gallstone and liver disease; for further discussion about his death and funeral, see Horowitz, *Wagner Nights*, especially pp. 11–17, and 249–52.

142 See “Schalk, Franz”, by Deryck Cooke, in *Grove Music Online*.

143 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 Nov 1898, 4.
Even if criticized for being too “safe”, interpretively, Schalk seemed to have managed the balance of the orchestra and singers well, rarely did the former overwhelm the latter.

For the following season, Grau hired another Austrian conductor, Emil Paur (1855–1932) to lead his company. After assuming various posts in Germany in his early career, Paur had moved to the States in 1893 to succeed Arthur Nikisch at the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and in 1898, he relocated to New York to become music director of the Philharmonic Society, filling the post vacated by the recently deceased Seidl. Even though he was with the company for only one season, critics generally found him a more appealing and skillful leader than Schalk. After Paur, Grau invited Walter Damrosch to conduct the next two terms; for his part, Damrosch had not intended to return to opera after running his eponymous troupe, but accepted the post as it did not carry any managerial or financial responsibilities. Reviews of the performances under Damrosch were similar to those of his earlier endeavors, but there was evidence that his interpretations had matured towards more flexible and lively readings. Furthermore, the orchestra seemed to have improved under Damrosch’s baton, compared to the frequent complaint in the previous seasons that the ensemble sounded slipshod and out of tune.

For his company’s final season, Grau at last found a conductor who approached the insight and emotional power of the Seidl renditions, the German-born Alfred Hertz (1872–1942). This was the beginning of Hertz’s lengthy tenure at the Metropolitan, which would last until 1915. Under his direction, the Ring performances of the 1902–1903 season seemed to acquire a new life. Many American critics commended him for his eloquent interpretations of the scores, which, to them, reflected a greater understanding of Wagner’s intentions than what was achieved by the recent group of conductors. The orchestra too seemed to be energized by

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145 See “Paur, Emil,” by J.A. Fuller Maitland and Malcolm Miller, in Grove Music Online.
146 For a brief biography, see Michael Steinberg’s entry for “Hertz, Alfred”, in Grove Music Online. Hertz achieved notoriety when he conducted the American premiere of Parsifal in 1903 at the Metropolitan Opera; it had gone against Cosima Wagner’s wishes and he, as well as some of the singers who participated in the production, were banned from ever appearing in Bayreuth again. In 1915, he left New York to become the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony.
Hertz’s efforts, sometimes to the point of overwhelming the singers in volume, but in general, they gave far more polished performances than ever before, the result of Hertz’s insistence for many rehearsals. As notable as they were, Hertz’s readings of the Ring’s scores were not entirely without some idiosyncrasies. W.L. Hubbard of the Chicago Daily Tribune found that Hertz sometimes took a rather expansive approach to many portions of Die Walküre, which he believed was influenced by the prevailing fashion at Bayreuth. It was felt mainly in the second act where, despite four large cuts, it still seemed very long because of the slow tempi taken in the conversation between Wotan and Brünnhilde, and especially in the scene of the “annunciation of death.” In Cincinnati, the critic for the city’s Enquirer also found Hertz’s interpretation of the first two acts quite “sleepy”, although he did bring out some of the opera’s climaxes “like never before.” During his tenure at the Metropolitan Opera, Hertz further established the Ring operas in the house company’s repertory and with American audiences; he conducted no fewer than eighteen complete cycles between 1903 and 1915.

Courtesy of the Mapleson cylinders, we are today able to hear snippets of what the performances of the Ring sounded like during the Grau seasons (see Appendix J). In 1900, the Metropolitan Opera’s music librarian, Lionel S. Mapleson, acquired a phonograph, with which he made many wax-cylinder, non-commercial recordings of live staged performances by the Grau company between 1901 and 1903. Some of the earlier ones were made from the prompter’s box but later, Mapleson found they would be better of quality if he situated himself and the phonograph from a catwalk suspended forty feet directly above the stage. It was from

147 Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 Apr 1903, 5.
148 Cincinnati Enquirer, 22 Apr 1903, 7.
this vantage point that most of the excerpts from *Die Walküre, Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* were recorded (except for one of Jean de Reszke as Siegfried in 1901, which was made from the prompter’s box). According to Simon Trezise’s thorough analysis of these cylinders, these recordings suggest aural evidence of the Bayreuth style of singing.\footnote{The Mapleson Cylinders: Wagner at the Met, 1900–1904,“ in *The Wagner Journal* 2, no. 3 (2008): 4–26; his discussion of the cylinders containing excerpts from the *Ring* is on pp. 20–25.} They also provide an idea of Hertz’s conducting style and possible interpretation of the *Ring* score, which was a preference for swift tempos, and a meticulous attention to Wagner’s dynamic markings. If the reviews are any further indication, these presentations, musically, seemed to have been of fairly high standard, and were probably quite moving to experience.

**Staging**

At the beginning of the 1898–1899 season, new scenery, props, and costumes were required for the Metropolitan performances of all the *Ring* operas, as most, if not all, of it from the German seasons was destroyed in the house’s devastating 1892 fire. While the rebuilt and repainted sets were fresh and vivid, they did not depart much from the aesthetic of late-nineteenth-century romantic realism. Furthermore, the Metropolitan’s stage directors of this period—William Parry (for seasons 1895–1896, 1896–1897), Pierre Bandu (for 1898–1899, 1899–1900), Paul Schumann (1900–1901, possibly 1901–1902), and Johannes Elmblad (1902–1903)—did not venture to give new visual interpretations of the drama; they were really stage managers, chiefly responsible for developing and coordinating the stage action.\footnote{The other chief stage personnel at the Metropolitan at the end of the nineteenth century included C.D. McGiehan as the stage machinist, Edward Siedle as the property master, and James Stewart as the electrician.} Notably, they sought to advance improvements and other solutions that would better realize Wagner’s ideal for the visual presentation of the cycle. This was similar to Cosima Wagner’s aim for the Bayreuth productions at this time; as David Breckbill has observed:

…instead of seeing Wagner’s operas as dramas requiring modifications and glosses to retain relevance, in the late nineteenth century the technical difficulties that needed to be surmounted were part of what made it seem that Wagner’s works and legacy remained
unfinished and thus alive, striving toward an ideal embodiment of that had not yet been attained. And Bayreuth was in many ways the laboratory in which work toward this end was most concentrated.152

In this way, the Metropolitan Opera House seemed to be an extension of the Bayreuth “laboratory”, since the American presentations of the Ring continued to be modeled on Festival version, this time from 1896. Indeed, they continued to be promoted as such, like the large advertisement for the 1899–1900 cycles proclaimed in the Metropolitan’s program booklets: “The ensemble and the productions will follow as closely as possible the admirable model so nobly set by Bayreuth [...] [...] All the operas will be mounted in lavish style and in accordance with the best traditions observed at Bayreuth.”153

There was continued interest in the various stage effects of the Ring at the end of the nineteenth century, as evident in the articles that appeared in cultural and technological magazines at this time, as well as in newspapers. Among them was a piece published in Scientific American in May 1897 describing the technical developments at the Metropolitan Opera House, including the new properties used for the Ring’s operas.154 Gustav Kobbé also wrote another behind-the-scenes account of the Grau company’s production of the cycle for the November 1899 issue of The Century Illustrated Magazine, with accompanying illustrations by Archie Gunn.155 In it, Kobbé explains in detail how various scenic effects of the Ring were achieved, in order to elucidate for his readers Wagner’s principle that the scenery is a vital part of the unfolding drama. Since archival materials of these productions are unfortunately no longer extant, these remaining sources reveal how aspects of the Ring cycle’s staging were accomplished during this period and consider their efficacy in performance.

For the Ring cycles of 1898 to 1903, the scenery, though new, was constructed the

153 See Figure 7.1.
154 See “Behind the Scenes at the Grand Opera”, in Vol. 77, no. 22 (29 May 1897): 337, 346–47. This article was subsequently republished in Alfred A. Hopkins’s compilation, Magic: Stage Illusions, Special Effects and Trick Photography (New York: Munn and Co., 1898).
same as before; that is, painted on flat, canvas drops. Even so-called “three-dimensional” scenic props gave only the illusion of depth, such as the rock in the opening scene of Das Rheingold, which was built out of two canvas “profiles,” one placed in front of the other, and far enough apart to allow a ladder between them so Alberich could climb it. Many of the methods to create certain effects were retained from the German seasons; for example, the stereopticon and glass-prism apparatus used to create the rainbow bridge; the rabbit hutch with cannon balls to simulate thunder; the spring release of the anvil that when struck by Siegfried’s sword, made it look as if it split in half. Other devices went through modifications—some minor, others major—either to make them more safe or reliable, or to improve on the overall effect. In the former category were the alterations made to Siegfried’s forge and Wotan’s spear. According to Hopkins, the old forge of the German seasons required a man situated underneath the table to blow lycopodium powder onto a gas-lit burner in order to produce the effect of flames. The new forge employed a safer method, whereby a stage hand manipulated the quantity of gas fed to a rose burner, which when ignited, would produce flames of variable size (see Figure 7.2).\textsuperscript{156}

As for the spear, an electric version was replaced with a simpler, more consistent mechanism. The prop consisted of a divided shaft, where, as Hopkins explains, “one part of which telescopes with the other for a few inches. The upper part of the spear is forced down over the lower, thus compressing a coiled spring. When the spring is compressed sufficiently, it is caught by a catch.” When Siegfried strikes the spear with his sword, the Wanderer presses a button which released the upper part of the spear (Figure 7.3). As a result, the coiled part rises, it lights matches secured by holders in the center of the lower part of the spear. A piece of sandpaper is secured to a little door which opens in the shell of the top part of the spear. As the sandpaper passes the matches, it lights them, setting fire to a small quantity of gun cotton, which lights flash paper concealed in the end of the spear. A lightning flash and a flash of thunder usually accompany the breaking of the spear.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{156} See Hopkins, Magic, 329-30.
\textsuperscript{157} Op. cit., 335.
Figure 7.2. Siegfried's Forge at the Metropolitan Opera House, 1897.\footnote{Illustration from “Behind the Scenes at the Grand Opera,” 346.}

Figure 7.3. Wotan’s Spear, 1897.\footnote{Illustration from op. cit., 347.}

Figure 7.4. The “Wurm.”\footnote{Illustration from “Wagner from Behind the Scenes,” 70.}
Significant improvements had been made to the beasts of the *Ring*, especially to the dragon and the serpent, which had previously been criticized. The dragon, Fafner, had now become an impressive (and more technically complicated) beast. It was operated by two men, who were also dressed as the fore claws and back feet of the reptile. The man in front wore a belt that was laced with wires that delivered the current to the green electric lights in the dragon’s eyes, as well as a rubber hose that issued steam through its mouth. These effects were manipulated by two separate stage hands in the back, one controlling the steam, the other controlling the lights of the eyes, while the man in the reptile’s forelegs pulled on various cords to move its upper jaw, giant red tongue, feelers, and to open and close its nostrils. Meanwhile, the man who is the dragon’s hind legs moves the head up and down, using a long iron lever that extends from Fafner’s head and through the body. To convey the voice part, the singer used a speaking trumpet, as before, and sang either from the wings or under a raised bridge, directly beneath the beast.\(^{161}\) By comparison, the “Wurm” into which Alberich transforms in *Das Rheingold*, was operated by only one man (see Figure 7.4). To give the realistic effect of a slithering serpent, as Kobbé told his readers,

> The snake is mounted on small wheels which are entirely hidden from view...A section in the serpent’s back opens on hinges. A man gets inside the monster, stretches himself out face downward, and the lid is closed. The man thrusts a couple of sharp pegs through holes in the snake’s belly, and by digging them into the stage floor works the beast along, while, with a string which he holds between his teeth, he plays the lower jaw of the monster so that it shows its fangs as it crosses the stage. The serpent’s tail is made in joints connected by two wires to which stirrups are attached. The man puts his feet in the stirrups and by moving his legs as if he were swimming makes the long tail curve and straighten out again.\(^{162}\)

This contraption was praised by the critic of the *New York Tribune* as a “masterpiece of mechanism”.

Two stage effects that were considerably modified, in keeping with the Bayreuth model, were the swimming Rhinedaughters and the Ride of the Valkyries. For the former, the wheeled

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\(^{162}\) Kobbé, 71–72; illustration from 70.
carriages from the original 1876 production were replaced by cradles suspended by wires that were drawn over trolley lines high up in the fly galleries. The cradles themselves were tilted slightly upwards; the singers were secured in them lying on their fronts, and the straps were adjusted to allow them to move their arms. Strips of flowing gauze that matched their costumes hid the apparatus. To maneuver the Rhinedaughters up and down, across the stage, and around the rocks, as per to Wagner’s instructions, several complex actions were performed. To raise and lower the cradles, the suspension wires were drawn in and then released; the wires attached to a system of trolley wheels allowed the singers to move back and forth across the stage. To guide the Rhinedaughters around the rocks, swivels were attached to the wires from the cradles to the trolley wheels; three stagehands then used the shorter wires hanging down from each cradle to swing it in any direction. In total, it still took no less than nine men, three with each cradle, to create this complicated illusion (see Figure 7.5).\footnote{The mechanism behind the swimming Rhinedaughters was of significant interest and it was described in detail by Kobbé, 68–69 (illustration from p. 66), and in the New York Tribune, 26 Feb 1899, 40. A description and technical diagram of the same apparatus as it was used in Bayreuth between 1896 and 1914 is discussed in Carl-Friedrich Baumann’s Bühnentechnik im Festspielhaus (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1980), 191.}

The Grau company also employed a visual trick used in the 1896 Bayreuth Ring to simulate the Ride of the Valkyries: instead of Doepler’s painted glass slides projected onto a backdrop, it was young boys dressed as the Valkyries placed on hobby horses (see Figure 7.6). The coordination of this effect was far more complicated than the slide projections. In the background, a high platform spanned the stage, as if a narrow bridge; a backdrop painted with clouds hung behind it. The platform itself undulated in a series of short irregular waves, and at one end, it sloped upward, as if into the sky. The boy-Valkyries and their hobby horses, which are on wheels, were then placed on the tracks of the platform. The scene then unfolded like this:

As there are four Valkyrs on the stage when the curtain rises, only four of the hobby-horses and boys are drawn across to the higher end and placed in position to be run down the platform at the given signal. The other four are held in reserve at the lower end for the final rush at the close of the scene. When Gerhilde shouts her greeting to Helmwige [Helmwige, hier! Hieher mit dem Roß!], the men in charge of the hobby-horses give one of them a slight shove which suffices to start it down the incline with its
Figure 7.5. The swimming Rhinedaughters.

Figure 7.6. The “Boy-Valkyries.”

164 Figures 7.5 and 7.6 are from “Wagner from Behind the Scenes,” pp. 66 and 69, respectively.
boy Valkyr; and it rises and falls like a galloping horse as it passes over the irregular surface of the platform. At the same time a light is flashed over from above on the moving figure, while another flares through the transparent cloud drop. A few minutes after the hobby-horse with its boy burden disappears behind the scenes, the real Helmwig enters from the forest, as if she had ridden down from the clouds and, having left her horse in the pines, had come to join her sisters on the rock.\footnote{Kobbé, 73–74; illustration from p. 69.}

After the remaining three Valkyries had entered on stage, the eight boys and their wooden horses, gathered at the lower end of the platform, would wait until the end of the scene, when on cue, they were drawn back up the incline by a windlass.

How did these various effects fare in the Grau company’s staged performances of the \textit{Ring} operas? In a word, inconsistently, for sometimes, they worked smoothly, but in many cases they did not. The production of \textit{Das Rheingold} had both triumphant presentations and utter failures. On the occasions the swimming apparatus functioned well, American critics described that the effect was realistic and entirely convincing, “the best the company ever had.” In other performances, the machines did not work effortlessly, such as the one that took place on March 3, 1900, when the wires attached to the singers’ cradles could only swivel in one direction (i.e. around the rock at the center of the stage), but did not allow them to ascend or descend. As a result, they could not give the appropriate impression of swimming actively, and thus, their teasing of Alberich came across as too tame.\footnote{\textit{New York Times}, 4 Mar 1900, 18 (review was signed by William J. Henderson).} Some of the singers in the parts of the Rhinedaughters found they got motion sickness while being swung on the wires, as was the case with Camille Seygard, who portrayed Wellgunde in a February 1902 performance. As a solution, she stood in the wings to sing her part, while a proxy acted on her behalf on stage. Nevertheless, this hampered the complete illusion, since the other two singers were able to fulfill their roles physically.\footnote{\textit{New York Tribune}, 25 Feb 1902, 6.}

Of the other effects in \textit{Das Rheingold}, the most consistently effective one seemed to be Alberich’s transformation into the “Wurm”; otherwise, the performances were hobbled by various
staging problems in general. The management of the lighting was especially bad; many reviews noted that the lights often went up or down “without rhyme or reason”, and gradual changes, like a sunrise, were accomplished with fits and starts. In other cases, the timing of the variations in lighting was off; notably, Erda’s appearance and disappearance in the fourth scene was rarely coordinated well, and sometimes, the lights did not go down as she ascended, or they came up too early before she had disappeared. Some effects were not even attempted in full. While Grau’s company gave the first American performances of Das Rheingold without intermission, they eschewed Wagner’s directions for scenic transformations aided by steam, and instead, used actual curtains that concealed the stage at these points. The New York Tribune’s critic thought this solution was better than a poor effort at the real thing, and noted that perhaps the Metropolitan stage did not have the needed mechanism to create the “steam curtains” (it seemed perhaps that the perforated steam pipe from the German seasons might not have been re-installed in the reconstruction of stage after the 1892 fire.) As well, the entrance of the gods into Valhalla via the rainbow bridge was not physically depicted, but was left to the audience to imagine as they gazed at a “picturesque reflection of prismatic colors instead of a clumsy, practicable affair.” 168 In all these aspects, the Grau presentation actually departed from some of the ungainly attempts at realism in Cosima’s Bayreuth production.169

On the whole, the other operas of the cycle suffered fewer technical problems (to be sure, Das Rheingold was still the most challenging work of the tetralogy to stage). The complaints of the American critics were mostly directed at the poor coordination of lighting effects, and sometimes the lack of nuance in their realization. For example, the shimmering light of the forest in Siegfried, was compared by one critic to a boy’s tricks with a piece of mirror and sunlight, casting shadows that “must have been six feet square”, rather than small flickering

168 New York Tribune, 13 Jan 1899, 8.
169 Among the solutions to depict the entrance of the gods into Valhalla for productions of Das Rheingold in Bayreuth before 1914, was a series of puppets mounted on wheels that moved on an upward-sloping track. See Baumann, Bühnentechnik im Festspielhaus, 231.
shafts. Perhaps surprisingly, the illusion of the Ride of the Valkyries received little comment, save Henderson, who claimed it was the worst method yet that had been tried: “A lot of woolly property horses, which are so plainly property horses that they would not create an illusion for a child, are sent down a toboggan slide behind a cut in a cloud drop, and illuminated with magnesium lightning while they descend. The lightning brings out all their defects clearly.” In his opinion, he much preferred the stereopticon effect of the earlier seasons, although he recommended this solution might be further improved using a kinetoscope, an early progenitor of the motion-picture camera, with mounted Valkyries photographed in motion and then projected on a backdrop.

The effect that most disappointed critics was still the final conflagration of the gods at the end of *Götterdämmerung*. Even Kobbé’s technical description of this bit of “trick scenery” involving hinged panels and painted drops—essentially, a two-dimensional representation—leaves much to be desired in the imagination:

> The wings are folding screens. The hall scene is painted on the front panels. With the crash [of thunder] the screens are opened, and the ruins, which are painted on the inside panels, are disclosed. The upper halves of some of the columns are mere front flaps working on hinges. At the proper moment these flaps are allowed to fall, disclosing the broken columns painted on the canvas behind them. The rising of the Rhine is effected by three strips of “set water,” which are first laid flat on the stage and gradually raised to an upright position. At the same time, a water cloth is drawn forward over a portion of the stage, and the Rhine-daughters seize Hagen and drag him down with them.\(^{170}\)

According to the contemporary reviews, this final scene was usually bungled in performance, a result which the journalists thought to be inexcusable for a resident company of the size and reputation of Grau’s at the Metropolitan Opera.

Mishaps aside, it is worth remembering that the *Ring* cycle was (and still is) one of the most difficult operatic works to stage; it places huge demands on stage managers who must develop and implement very complex solutions to achieve the appropriate illusion. Kobbé’s descriptions of two other effects bring to light the sheer man-power and coordination necessary

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to create them at the Metropolitan Opera at the fin-de-siècle. One is Donner’s hammer blow in Scene 4 of Das Rheingold, which must be delivered exactly with a musical cue (in m. 850); this was how the moment was staged in 1899:

Donner’s hammer has a hollow head of canvas on a wire frame. In the head is an electric lamp, and a wire passes through the handle. As Donner brings the canvas head down on the canvas rock he presses a button in the handle, and the head of the hammer glows. To produce the sound of Donner’s stroke, a stage-hand, behind the rock strikes an anvil with a real hammer. A man at a stereopticon flashes a streak of lightning on the back drop, and in order to make this lightning still more lurid, another man produces a real flash with an electric apparatus known as the “lightning box”. Then a property-man strikes the “thunder-drum”—a large, square box covered with rawhide—and another opens the “rabbit-hutch,” a more elaborate thunder apparatus upstairs, and allows a number of cannon-balls to roll through a series of zinc-lined troughs.171

The other scene is the “Magic Fire” at the conclusion of Die Walküre, which required an elaborate scheme of changes in electric lighting, steam, and gas and lycopodium torches. The entire act began with a blue-lit border surrounding the rock which remained on until Brünnhilde entreats Wotan to encircle the rock on which she will sleep with fire (Auf dein Gebot entbrenne ein Feuer.) At the moment she says “Feuer”, the stage manager directed the electrician at the switchboard to turn on the red border lights; to intensify the red light, the electrician gradually removed the blue lights from the border. Wotan then calls on Loge to surround the rock, and at his last invocation, he strikes his spear on the rock, at which point the stagehand turned the cock to release steam from a box situated behind it. As the steam rose, another stagehand switched on a light with a red lens, to produce the effect of a fire emerging from the rock. To further enhance the realism of the flames, several stagehands stood at the back of the stage with gas and lycopodium torches, which flared when lit.172

Ultimately, it appeared the problems in the consistency of the Grau company’s stagings of the Ring operas had mostly to do with inadequate rehearsal time for the coordination of the cycle’s visual elements with the musical score. Henderson of the New York Times blamed these

problems, in part, on the lack of a single stage manager who had a proper understanding of the music of the operas:

[U]nless someone thoroughly acquainted with the scores of the operas stands behind the electricians and directs their operations, they always will be [bad]. As for the calcium light men, they need special supervision. These seem to be small matters, but it is in just such things that the great differences between our performances of the standard operas and those of Munich and Dresden consist.\(^{173}\)

A turning point seemed to occur in the 1902–1903 season, when Alfred Hertz conducted the performances. Hertz had insisted on numerous staged rehearsals of *Das Rheingold* before the company presented its first cycle of the year, and according to the reviews of its performance, there was a huge improvement in its execution. Moreover, the presentations may have run more smoothly with Johannes Elmblad, the Swedish bass-baritone, as the stage manager. Elmblad presumably had a deeper knowledge of the *Ring*’s music than Parry, Bandu, or Schumann as he had sung in the 1896 *Ring*, and in the American performances as Hunding and Fafner.\(^{174}\)

**Audience Reception**

Whatever the imperfections of the *Ring* dramas’ stagings by the Grau company, the cycle’s operas continued to bring in substantial audiences of Americans to the Metropolitan Opera and the auditoriums of theatres in other cities. Some critics surmised that the American public was mostly attracted to seeing the star singers performing, but others believed that the demand for the cycle was sustained by a large and enthusiastic core audience of genuine Wagner lovers. These people, they commented, attended out of appreciation of the operas, despite the quality of the performances themselves being quite variable. As the critic of the *New York Times* recalled for a 1902 presentation of *Götterdämmerung*, “the audience’s interest

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\(^{173}\) *New York Times*, 21 Mar 1900, 6.

\(^{174}\) Unfortunately, very little is known about William Parry, Pierre Bandu and Paul Schumann and whether they had any particular views about staging Wagner’s *Ring*. In the case of Elmblad, he was known to hold opposing views to Cosima on the staging of the Bayreuth *Ring*, but exactly how it translated in his own direction of the U.S. cycle in the 1903 is not revealed in the American reviews. He later went on to direct the first presentations of the *Ring* in Stockholm in 1907. For further discussion on Elmblad’s Wagner activities, see Stefan Johansson’s “Wagners Ring på Kungliga Operan: Regi och framförande-traditioner under ett sekel,” in *Operavärldar Från Monteverdi till Gershwin*, ed. Torsten Pettersson (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2006), 219–46.
never seemed to flag for an instant, and at the end of each act there was that perfect silence till
the last note of the music was completed, which is one of the marks of identification of an
audience trained in the Wagnerian conception of the lyric drama."\textsuperscript{175} In Boston and Chicago
where Americans had also been familiarized with the \textit{Ring} by the various resident companies of
the Metropolitan and by the Damrosch troupe, interest in the cycle's operas did not appear to
have waned either. On the other side of the country in San Francisco, for the premiere of the
complete cycle in that city, the auditorium of the Grand Opera House was jam-packed each
evening with "one mass of interested, absorbed humanity."\textsuperscript{176} Critics seemed pleased to see
that in general, American interest in Wagner's epic work had deepened, evolving beyond being
a mere passing fad or curiosity.

It is more difficult to glean from the reviews what \textit{kinds} of Americans attended the Grau
presentations of the \textit{Ring} cycle but the occasional comment did surface that might shed some
light on the issue. Predictably, members of the upper-class were a significant demographic;
ocasionally, the papers would publish who occupied the boxes of the auditorium for a given
performance. The \textit{New Yorker StaatsZeitung} reported that the galleries were full of enthusiastic
attendees for the first uncut \textit{Ring} cycle, thus also indicating a strong middle-class presence.\textsuperscript{177}
However, not all performances of the operas drew full houses, and usually, it was the boxes and
seats in the pricier sections of the hall that remained vacant. For instance, Hubbard of the
\textit{Chicago Daily Tribune} noted that for the Grau company's staging of \textit{Die Walküre} at the Chicago
Auditorium in 1903, the upper parts of the house had been especially well filled, and the main
floor had a considerable number of the "fashionable" crowd, while many boxes remained
unused. This observation appears to further confirm that there was still a significant middle-
class component to the American audience of the \textit{Ring} operas. Women too continued to be a

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{New York Times}, 7 Mar 1902, 9.
\textsuperscript{176} See the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} reviews of the cycle, on 27 Nov 1900, 7; 28 Nov 1900, 7; 29 Nov 1900; and
1 Dec 1900, 14.
\textsuperscript{177} See the \textit{StaatsZeitung} reviews to the first performances of the uncut \textit{Ring} on 13 Jan 1899, 8; 18 Jan 1899, 8; 20
Jan 1899, 8; 25 Jan 1899, 8.
significant part of the demographic; the matinee cycles were arranged specifically for single females as well as suburbanites, according to this observation of the *New York Times* critic:

[The afternoon performances] will be of benefit to those suburbanites who cannot conveniently attend the night representations, and it will also afford opportunities to hear the works to those women who are so unfortunate as to be without escorts to the serious proceedings of the Wagnerian drama in the evenings.¹⁷⁸

An idea of what the *Ring* operas meant financially to the Grau company can be ascertained by a sample of the box office receipts from the 1898–1899 season, when the first uncut cycle was performed. The profits generated from ticket sales to all the performances of the *Ring* operas that year are summarized in Figure 7.7. Several conclusions can be drawn from these numbers. For one, it is evident from the receipts for the complete uncut cycles that there was not a uniform size of audience for each opera. Indeed, if profits are the gauge, *Götterdämmerung* was by far the most popular of the four operas, earning substantially higher receipts. This evidence seems to contradict the view of critics that *Die Walküre* was the favorite, yet, this opera was performed more often than *Götterdämmerung*. Moreover, *Die Walküre* was the most often *Ring* opera performed on tour, probably because it was the easiest one to stage in multiple venues.¹⁷⁹ It was felt as well that the emotional and dramatic power of this opera’s drama appealed to people who were not necessarily “ultra-Wagner” in taste. Taken together, however, the performances of the *Ring* operas were a significant revenue generator, with most of those given in New York achieving an average of around $7,000 profit each. Compared to other works in the performing repertory, it only lagged behind *Tristan und Isolde* (which earned an average of $9,800 profit per performance), *Don Giovanni* (about $8,500), *Faust, Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin* (about $8,000 average profits each). On tour, performances of *Lohengrin* usually brought in the highest receipts, and *Die Walküre* the second highest.

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¹⁷⁹ See, for example, the reviews in the *Boston Globe*, 29 Mar 1903, 9, and *New York Times*, 17 Jan 1903, 9.
Figure 7.7. Box Office Receipts of the *Ring* Operas of the Grau Company, 1898–1899.\(^\text{180}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Date of Performance</th>
<th>Location of Performance</th>
<th>Box Office Receipts</th>
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Poor health ultimately forced Grau to retire at the end of the 1902–1903 season, but within the five years the company was under his directorship, he had transformed the system of opera management and performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in a substantial way. He extended the operatic season; his troupe gave no less than 434 performances total (for an astounding average of eighty-seven stagings per season), and also toured to thirty-seven North American cities. Grau presented in each season, a relatively equal combination of French, Italian, and German repertory. To this end, he hired singers, European and North-American, who could interpret these works in the original language of their texts; no longer were native German singers, for example, the only—or even the best—interpreters of German-language operas, including Wagner’s. Significantly, Wagner’s *Ring* operas became further rooted into

\(^{180}\) Extant box office receipts for the Grau Company are held at the Metropolitan Opera Archives, New York.
cosmopolitan musical culture of the U.S., espoused as the pinnacle of not only artistic progress but the appreciation of which indicated cultural advancement. Even though the visual aspects of the stagings of these works were not always executed consistently, Americans continued to flock to the presentations in large numbers. To critics at the fin-de-siècle, such evidence of engagement with Wagner’s cycle confirmed the advancement of American intellectual and cultural life. As William J. Henderson described the New York audiences in 1900,

[C]ertainly the permanent place which [the Nibelung dramas] have obtained in the musical life of this town is an evidence of the wide spread of musical intelligence. […] I am convinced that the Wagner drama is now accepted by the mass of music lovers as a matter of course. It no longer puzzles them. It no longer offers to them passages of unmitigated tiresomeness. […] We have learned to understand the dramatic value of these things, and to rightly estimate their significance as the parts of large plans which demand acceptance in toto…. 181

The phenomenon was not just limited to New York; other cities too boasted about their citizens’ appreciation of Wagner’s Ring as a sign of cultural progress. Regarding the first presentation of the cycle in San Francisco in November 1900, the reporter for the Chronicle noted that it was an important event for the cultural reputation of the city, which he now ranked as equal to New York, Boston, Chicago, and even some of the major European cities, “in taste and willingness to pay for the best opera.” 182 The news of these developments inevitably found their way across the Atlantic to Bayreuth. According to Louis C. Elson of the Boston Daily Advertiser, Cosima Wagner once questioned him on the state of the American reception of her husband’s operas, enquiring “Is my husband’s music understood in America, or is it merely a fashion of the present?” By way of a published response, he did not hesitate to confirm the devotion of American audiences to Wagner’s music:

[!]Instead of becoming tired of the subject, every Wagner lecture, every analysis of his works, is certain of good attendance and careful study on the part of the public. All these significant straws point to the fact that the Wagner revolution has become a “fait accompli”; there may never be a Wagner school of composers, but Wagner’s own works are secure for all time. 183

182 San Francisco Chronicle, 26 Nov 1900, 5.
183 Boston Daily Advertiser, 7 Feb 1899, 4.
EPILOGUE

“In those days [1886–1889] New York had better Wagner opera than any city in Germany, and it remains to this day one of the world’s headquarters of Wagnerism. Thus, whenever we look in the musical world, we find Wagner triumphant, and the public enthusiastic.”

--Henry T. Finck, 1895

Although this dissertation concludes with the end of Maurice Grau’s management of the resident company at New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 1903, historically, this was the beginning of a new phase in the performance and reception of Wagner’s operas in the United States. Joseph Horowitz has described this period as a gradual decline in American Wagnerism, that is, “a waning of the Gilded Age’s constructive, redemptive ‘Wagner’ and the doom of American innocence”, which ultimately ends with World War I. While he acknowledges that this was interconnected to concurrent developments in European Wagnerism, the extent to which these socio-cultural factors, especially the role of nationalism impacted the performance and reception of Wagner’s works America has yet to be investigated thoroughly. As Jessica Gienow-Hecht has observed, American attitudes towards German musicians and German musical culture were already starting to shift in the 1890s, just as the German seasons ended at the Metropolitan Opera House. The United States was then rapidly becoming a major political and industrial power on the international stage, but this ascent was attended by a growing concern about the lack of an indigenous art culture. A new, even militant form of musical patriotism arose, challenging Americans’ earlier open embracement of imported European musicians and music while American composers and musicians struggled. Meanwhile, a similar movement also swept Germany, spurred on by Wilhelm II, who had ascended to the throne following his father’s (Wilhelm I) death in 1888. Bayreuth became central to the advancement of Wilhelminian nationalism through Wagner’s closest disciples, which included his widow Cosima, who now

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1 From Finck’s introduction to Ferdinand Leeke’s *Pictorial Wagner* (New York: F. Hanfstaengl, 1895), 12.
managed the Festival, his son-in-law Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and Hans von Wolzogen, editor of the Bayreuth house journal, the *Bayreuther Blätter*. Under the influence of this tight-knit “Bayreuth Circle”, who claimed themselves as the sole legitimate heirs to the composer’s legacy, the Festival became a locus for the cultivation of a conservative-nationalist perspective, one that was vehemently pro-German and anti-Semitic. How this complex transatlantic context shaped Americans’ reception of Wagner’s music, in particular the *Ring*, warrants its own in-depth study. To round off this dissertation, however, the relationship between Americans and Bayreuth in 1896, when the *Ring* was revived for the first time at the Festival under Cosima Wagner’s direction, merits examination.

**Americans and the 1896 Bayreuth Festival**

After Wagner’s death in 1883, Cosima was instrumental in transforming the Bayreuth Festival into an (almost) annual event exclusively devoted to the performance of her husband’s operas. She also assumed authority over the productions, intent on making them the model standard; despite what one might think (or had thought of) her rather conservative aesthetic choices, these performances were regarded as exceptional, compared to the often truncated and under-rehearsed presentations given everywhere else. The Festival became a commercial success under her administration, attracting increasing numbers of foreign tourists seeking to experience Wagner’s works in this unique setting—and Americans were no exception. The topic of American Bayreuth tourism, including a thorough investigation of the remaining extant *Fremdenlisten*, still awaits further research. However, within the context of this dissertation, it is worth comparing Americans’ attendance and reception of the 1896 production of the *Ring* cycle to that of the cycle’s premiere twenty years earlier. By this time, American attitudes concerning the Festival had shifted remarkably. On the one hand, there were more Americans going to Bayreuth than ever before. On the other hand, U.S. critics responded with ambivalence to this first revival of the *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth; no longer a complete novelty, coverage of these
performances in American papers was limited but extant reviews reveal a deeply unsympathetic attitude towards Cosima Wagner.

Between 1876 and 1896, the Festival was held nine times, with the following operas in the years below:

- 1882 – Parsifal (16 performances)
- 1883 – Parsifal (12)
- 1884 – Parsifal (10)
- 1886 – Parsifal (9), Tristan und Isolde (8)
- 1888 – Parsifal (9), Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (8)
- 1889 – Parsifal (9), Tristan und Isolde (3), Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (5)
- 1891 - Parsifal (10), Tristan und Isolde (4), Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (4), Tannhäuser (4)
- 1892 – Parsifal (8), Tristan und Isolde (4), Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (4), Tannhäuser (4)
- 1894 – Parsifal (9), Lohengrin (6), Tannhäuser (5)

The press reported that Americans continued to make the journey across the Atlantic to see these performances; in fact, with each successive Festival, the total number of visitors from the U.S increased. Some were wealthy tourists already on holiday in Europe; many others were enthusiasts who traveled exclusively for the event. Dedicated “Wagnerites” were especially keen to see Parsifal, the composer’s final work, which was staged only at the Festspielhaus, at least until 1903. Americans were also eager to support some of the artists they had seen during the Metropolitan Opera’s German seasons perform at the Bayreuth Festival. Cosima’s casting of tenor Max Alvary as Tristan for the 1891 Festival, for instance, prompted genuine American fervor; as the journalist for the Chicago Daily Tribune commented,

[Alvary] did six weeks’ hard labor on the character of Tristan before the festival. He had never appeared in that part, having promised Mrs. Wagner not to sing it before he could do so at Bayreuth...All the tickets for the “Tristan” nights were sold six weeks ago and hundreds of letters applying for stray tickets, mostly for American enthusiasts, having been returned to them. The rage among the New-Yorkers to hear their favorite is

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4 Hannu Salmi has identified extant Fremdenlisten for the years 1876, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1888, 1889, 1891, 1896, 1897 and 1899, although they are not all complete. See Salmi, Wagner and Wagnerism in Nineteenth-Century Sweden, Finland, and the Baltic Provinces (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005) 177–83. The Fremdenlisten for 1883, 1892, and 1894 appears to not have survived, but Albert Lavignac did record the French attendees for these years in his Le voyage artistique à Bayreuth (Paris: Libraire Ch. Delagrave, 1897), 550–78.
intense, and our handsome, gifted “Siegfried” returns their admiration by proudly acknowledging that he was made in New York.\(^5\)

By 1897, critics reported that Americans formed one of the largest groups of foreigners at the Festival. Their presence was so palpable according to the *New York Times*, that, “Anton Seidl [who conducted that year] remarked that, in looking over a Baireuth audience, he might easily have imagined that he was conducting in the Metropolitan Opera house, there were so many familiar faces to be seen.”\(^6\)

At the 1896 Festival, the full *Ring* cycle was given five times, compared to three times in 1876. The surviving 1896 *Fremdenlisten* consist of nineteen lists, which record the attendees for the first two cycles of performances: list nos. 1–10 for cycle 1 (July 19–22), and list nos. 12–19 for cycle 2 (July 26–29). List No. 11, and those for the third, fourth and fifth cycles, appear to be no longer extant. At this time, the lists were published by the firm, Lorenz Ellwanger, which also printed the town’s paper, the *Bayreuther Tagblatt*.\(^7\) Each list is eight pages long, and is comprised of data gathered primarily from accommodation records, which probably explains why the visitors were grouped according to lodging type, either in *Privat-Wohnungen* (private accommodation) or at one of the city’s hotels. The information registered includes the names of attendees, their profession (if known), place of origin, and the address of their residence in Bayreuth. Judging by the many advertisements that also appear on the lists, this publication clearly functioned as a “who’s who” record of—and for—Bayreuth attendees, and could be purchased by them as a souvenir.

An analysis of the American attendees recorded on the extant 1896 *Fremdenlisten* is quite revealing (identifiable Americans from the lists are compiled in Appendix K). As this table shows, the total number of registered attendees at two complete presentations of the cycle is over 250, more than three times as many American visitors recorded on the existing 1876

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\(^5\) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Jul 1891, 5.


\(^7\) The company still exists today and continues to publish books and other media about the Festival.
*Fremdenlisten* for the equivalent number of performances. It can be assumed then that if the lists for the third, fourth, and fifth cycles were available, the final total of attending Americans would have well exceeded 250.\(^8\) Similar to 1876, the largest proportion of American attendees came from New York (89) and Boston (34). More significant though is that in 1896, just over half of the total number came from *outside* these two cities (see Figure 8-1 below), including from as far south as Florida and Louisiana, to San Francisco on the West Coast. A good portion also came from the mid-west metropolises of Chicago and St. Louis, as well as from several cities in Ohio. Such a remarkable breadth of U.S. cities represented among the American Bayreuth tourists suggests that interest in Wagner's operas had spread significantly across the country since 1876. This was likely the result of the increased exposure of Americans to Wagner's music, including the *Ring* operas, over the past two decades. As examined in this dissertation, conductors and opera company impresarios were chiefly responsible for this development, performing orchestral excerpts from the operas, or fully-staged productions of them, on ambitious cross-country tours. In the 1890s, the Damrosch German Opera Company greatly expanded the American audience for the *Ring* through its staged performances of the cycle's operas; Walter Damrosch himself too initiated thousands into the complexities of the work through his popular explanatory lecture-recitals. Music critics in each city reported on and reviewed these performances in their respective newspapers. Although there might have been local variations in what was covered in the articles, the general view was that the staging of the *Ring's* operas were considered important cultural events, and the attention paid to them signified the advancement of American musical culture and taste.

Details concerning the occupations of the American attendees are not complete in the extant 1896 lists, as this information was recorded for only about a fifth of the total number

\(^8\) An increase in foreign tourists to Bayreuth from 1876 to 1896 is also evident among the French and Scandinavian visitors. According to Lavignac, there were 818 French attendees in 1896, compared to 54 in 1876. By Salmi's calculations, a total of 112 Swedish, Finnish, Baltic and Russian visitors attended the 1896 performances of the *Ring*, whereas there were 59 in 1876. Note that Lavignac's considerably larger total for the 1896 Festival might be because he had access to the complete *Fremdenlisten* from that summer as well as additional records, while Salmi's totals were derived from the same extant lists used in this study.
Figure 8-1. City of Origin of American Tourists in Bayreuth, 1896.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities with 2+ attendees</th>
<th>Cities with 2 attendees</th>
<th>Cities with 1 attendee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York: 89</td>
<td>Ann Arbor, MI</td>
<td>Engelwood, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston: 34</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>Hartford, CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia: 16</td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco: 14+</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Muscatine, IA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago: 10</td>
<td>Millington, NJ</td>
<td>Indianapolis, IN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis: 10</td>
<td>Mobile, AL</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisville, KY: 9</td>
<td>Nashville</td>
<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo: 7+</td>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Butte, MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amerika: 6</td>
<td>St. Paul, MN</td>
<td>Omaha, NE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galveston, TX: 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Newark, NJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC: 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberlin, OH: 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore: 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Massillon, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clermont, FL: 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Granville [??]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver, CO: 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Springfield [??]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo, OH: 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8-2. Occupations of American Tourists in Bayreuth, 1896.

| Privatier(e): 8          | Advokat [Barrister]: 1  |
| Rentier: 7               | Jurist [Attorney]: 1    |
| Student: 7               | Apotheker [Pharmacist]: 1 |
| Kaufmann [Businessman]: 5| Banquier [Banker]: 1    |
| Lehrer [Teacher]: 4      | Concert-organist: 1     |
| Journalist/Critic: 3     | Gesanglehrerin [Singing instructor, female]: 1 |
| Tonkünstlerin [Musician, female]: 3 | Maler [Painter]: 1 |
| Arzt [Medical doctor]: 2| Portrait-maler [Portrait-artist]: 1 |
| Merchant: 2              | Musician: 1             |
| Professor: 2             | Musik-Director: 1       |
| Traveller: 2             | Singer: 1               |
|                          | Voyageur: 1             |

registered. Figure 8-2 summarizes this limited data; without further material, only basic conclusions can be drawn about the economic and social class of these visitors. It appears that U.S. tourists to Bayreuth in general continued to be from the American middle and upper classes, the main audience for Wagner during the late nineteenth century. Significantly, the top three recorded “occupations” on this list consist of members obviously of the upper class, or upper-middle class, with eight persons of independent wealth, seven who lived on investment income, and five students (one might assume that such students who could afford to Bayreuth
likely came from families of relative privilege). Around 22 persons had identifiably middle-class professions (e.g. businessmen, lawyers, journalists, etc.), and 10 were musicians and artists. The three who indicated “traveler” or “voyageur” perhaps preferred to indicate that they were tourists in Bayreuth.

The increased number of American visitors to the 1896 Festival seemed to have little to do with the cost of the tickets to see the complete Ring cycle, which had risen by then. According to the New York Times, one had to purchase tickets to all four operas (i.e. tickets were not available for individual performances); each cost twenty American dollars, for a total of eighty dollars to see the entire work. This would most certainly have been a significant outlay for most middle class attendees, given that a ticket to see a performance of one Ring opera at the Metropolitan Opera would have cost $4 to $5, by comparison. Transatlantic travel, however, had continued to get cheaper, and the transcontinental railroad that now spanned across the U.S. offered Americans easier access to the East Coast in order to make the journey across to Europe. Rail travel within Germany was also relatively inexpensive, and though prices for accommodation in Bayreuth were higher during the Festival season, they were still accessible to a person of middle-class status. It appears that in 1896, most Americans stayed in private accommodation while the rest resided in the following hotels: the Hotel Reichsadler, the Hotel Sonne, the Hotel Anker, the Bahnhof-Hotel, and the Hotel Schwarzes Roß. The most expensive room at the Hotel Reichsadler, according to the 1902 edition of Karl Baedeker’s travel guide, Southern Germany: Handbook for Travellers, cost two German Marks per night, which, if the currency conversion chart in the book is accurate, was equivalent to 50 American cents.

As in the 1876 Fremdenlisten, perhaps the most remarkable aspect about the extant

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9 Americans wishing to purchase tickets and lodging to the 1896 Festival had to apply to the agents Novello, Ewer, & Co. in New York: “A special committee will assist visitors in finding suitable lodgings. When tickets are delivered to applicants, a form of application for lodgings will be furnished. Messrs. Novello, Ewer & Co. receive orders for tickets, which will be issued only for complete cycles, at $20 each.” See New York Times, 12 Apr 1896, 11.

10 See the Ninth Revised Ed. (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 103.
1896 lists was the considerable number of unmarried women who were recorded to have attended the Festival. These women are identified by the prefix “Miss”, “Ms.” or “Fraulein” (often abbreviated to Frl.), and are listed as by themselves or travelling with other unmarried women. For example, Miss Horenie Rhett is recorded as being with Miss Pierpont-Morgan and Miss Annie Morgan, along with an attendant (with a last name like “Pierpont-Morgan”, these women were presumably socialites). In total, there appeared to be at least 55 single American women at the 1896 performances, not including those listed who were evidently travelling with their mothers. Thus, their number had evidently increased since the 1876 Festival, which had also been attended by a notable number of unmarried American women. Aside from this demographic, an additional 19 women appear on the 1896 *Fremdenlisten* who are “undetermined” (i.e. they are listed with no prefix though they were clearly not accompanied by men), as well as at least 20 married women (identified by the prefix “Mrs.”, “Madame”, or “Frau”) who were recorded as travelling without a husband. If widowed, this latter group might have been accompanied by a son or daughter (whose name would also have been listed), but it seems some of these married women may have journeyed together.

Taken all together, most of these women were probably members of upper-class society (or at least upper-middle class), such as the four “privatières” from Louisville, Kentucky, and the several unmarried women who were registered as travelling with an attendant (*Bedienung*) or a chaperone (*Begleitung*). Many of them stayed together in the same accommodation: for example, at least thirteen unmarried women from all over the U.S. stayed at Karl Boller’s at Maxstrasse 24, while several of them from Louisville (including the four “privatières”) were also at the same address, but with different hosts. Still others from New York stayed with the privatier, Benno Seligsberg, on Kanzleistrasse 15, and the Drechsels, possibly sisters from San Francisco, resided with H. Pfeuffer. One can imagine that they may have encountered each other, perhaps even discussing, among other things, what they learned from Walter Damrosch’s lectures recitals on the *Ring* which many had sponsored in their respective hometowns.
Evidently, since 1876, it had become easier for women (of a certain class) to travel independently across the Atlantic, in the company of other women or female members of their families, seeking experiences such as the Wagner Festival. Exactly what going to Bayreuth meant to them, socially or personally, warrants deeper investigation, especially within the context of transatlantic travel and the ways in which it shaped notions of the “New Woman” in the early twentieth century.

**American Press Responses to the 1896 Festival**

While more Americans flocked to the 1896 Festival than ever before, the reportage by the American press was considerably less than for the Ring cycle’s 1876 world premiere. As at the first Festival, only the Ring operas were performed, with the complete cycle given once per week (spanning four successive evenings from Sunday to Wednesday) for five consecutive weeks. Of the major American papers, only the New York Times published individual reviews of the first group of performances; otherwise, the Boston Daily Advertiser printed only an overview of the Festival, and the New York Tribune reprinted the reviews published in the Times. Other notable dailies such as the Chicago Daily Tribune, Boston Globe, or the St. Louis Post-Dispatch published no articles about the event, except the occasional, brief notice announcing the next opera to be performed. One main reason for this comparative lack of press interest in the Ring’s first revival in Bayreuth might be that the cycle was no longer a complete novelty to many Americans, especially those who lived in certain cities. They had access to more staged presentations of the Ring operas (even though incomplete) than were ever performed in Bayreuth, given the recent efforts of Walter Damrosch and his company. Some Americans even journeyed to Europe to see stagings of the cycle in Munich, London, and elsewhere. Sensing that Americans were now more familiar with these operas, U.S. critics

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11 The dates of these performances were as follows: Cycle 1—July 19, 20, 21, 22; Cycle 2—July 26, 27, 28, 29; Cycle 3—August 2, 3, 4, 5; Cycle 4—August 9, 10, 11, 12; Cycle 5—16, 17, 18, 19.
probably felt that they no longer needed to provide detailed assessments of foreign performances of them.

Another reason for the relative inattention of American critics to the 1896 Festival might have borne out of their negative opinions regarding the management of the Festival under Cosima Wagner. For reasons that await further research, the American press at this time did not look favorably upon the composer’s widow. Some felt (perhaps not wrongly) that the Festival had become too much of a money-making scheme for the Wagner family, who they felt were capitalizing on the naiveté of foreign tourists, when the performances themselves were thought to be no longer at the peak of their artistic excellence. As the journalist for the Chicago Daily Tribune commented several months after the 1891 Festival:

The spirit of money-making had spread among the inhabitants of the unattractive Bavarian village until even Mme. Wagner, Councilor Gross, and Banker Feustel seemed thoroughly imbued with it. How many marks and pfennig could be laid hold of rather than how true to highest art standards could the performances be brought seemed the aim of those having the festival in charge.\(^\text{12}\)

The American reviews of the 1896 Festival reveal that this view persisted; according to the New York Times critic, “…the most important change of all has been in the character and spirit of the enterprise [the Festival]. This, avowedly intended by Wagner to advance tone and new art, and for no other purpose, is now an instrument to advance the pecuniary [financial] interests of the Wagner family.”\(^\text{13}\) Above all, the U.S. critics did not appear to favor Cosima’s directorial style, and were uncomfortable with her assertion that she alone knew best her husband’s intentions for staging his operas. Henry Krehbiel had heavily criticized her approach to Tannhäuser at the 1891 Bayreuth Festival, notably, the over-subordination of the orchestral part in service of clear vocal declamation, which resulted in odd fluctuations in tempi throughout.\(^\text{14}\) About these and other idiosyncrasies, William J. Henderson, too, expressed his

\(^{12}\) Chicago Daily Tribune, 27 Dec 1891, 28.

\(^{13}\) New York Times, 19 July 1896, 5.

\(^{14}\) Krehbiel’s main point of contention was that the vocal declamatory style of Wagner’s later works had been wrongly applied by Cosima to the earlier, “old-fashioned lyric vein” of Tannhäuser. See “Bayreuth Revisited”, in Scribner’s Magazine 11, no.1 (January 1892): 98–104.
concerns in 1896 about Cosima, whom he unflatteringly described as,

…an egotistical old woman, who has become convinced that her own peculiar fancies as to the correct manner of performing her husband’s works are direct inspirations. It is a matter of fact that no one has been guilty of more offenses against the master’s theories than the energetic lady whose battle hymn is “Wagner is Wagner, and Cosima is his prophet.”

Ultimately, it might well be because of U.S. critics’ misgivings of Cosima Wagner that their published responses to the 1896 Bayreuth performances of the Ring appear to be vague and ambivalent, compared to the gushing detail used to describe the 1876 premiere, and even of the U.S. performances of the cycle. The correspondent for the New York Times appeared to struggle to find something meaningful to say about the production. The backdrops, though newly designed and painted by the Brückner brothers (the same studio that Wagner used in 1876), were not exceptionally different from the first production. Strangely, the critic commented that the scenery for Das Rheingold “often did not accord with the Wagner tradition” while Die Walküre was “more in accordance” with “tradition”, although he did not elaborate on what he meant by this. The Hellenic-style costumes created by Hans Thoma received no more mention than a perfunctory evaluation of “good”. Cosima and her production team had developed to some new solutions to the practical problems of staging certain scenes—for example, the painted glass slides by Carl Doepler for the “Ride of the Valkyries”, were replaced by children on wooden horses, passing in the background—but these aspects were rarely described in detail.

16 See for example, in the New York Times, 19 Jul 1896, 5 (on the opening of the Festival); 20 Jul 1896, 5 (review of Das Rheingold); 21 Jul 1896, 5 (review of Die Walküre); 22 July 1896, 5 (review of Siegfried); 23 July 1896, 6 (review of Götterdämmerung).
18 Perhaps one notable exception was the St. Louis Post-Dispatch journalist who gave a preview, three months in advance of the Festival, of how some of the various illusions were to be achieved. Regarding the “Ride”, he wrote that it was to be represented by young horsewomen mounted on a trained horse, which will race at full speed, at the back of the stage, on which will be laid a thick rubber [carpet?]. The horses’ shoes will be
The performances of the singers and orchestra received more attention. Lilli Lehmann’s Brünnhilde and Hans Breuer’s Mime were found to be especially excellent; Rosa Sucher’s portrayal of Sieglinde and Marie Brema’s of Fricka were also praised. Both Emil Gerhauser and Wilhelm Grüning, Siegmund and the young Siegfried, respectively, sang well, but the critic thought their physical movements were rather stiff, perhaps an indirect criticism of Cosima’s highly regimented approach to the stage action, by which she ensured that every gesture corresponded with the music. An over-fatigued Grüning was replaced by Alois Burgstaller for Götterdämmerung, but Burgstaller, a “pupil of the Baireuth Training School”, was declared by the critics to be quite unfit for the role, lacking polish in his singing and acting. By all accounts, the orchestra sounded admirable under the “incomparable” Hans Richter, though in the opinion of C.W. Sanderson, the correspondent of the Boston Daily Advertiser, the conductor probably endured much from Cosima to help achieve her predominant goal for vocal clarity:

...[Richter] is much fatigued from daily, laborious rehearsals for many weeks past at the theatre under the constant advice the dictation of Frau Cosima Wagner, who evidently is much absorbed in the great production given here yearly. And why not? For it is a source of great revenue to her, a fortune not to be sneered at.19

American critics’ general lack of enthusiasm for Cosima’s direction of the Ring may be a chief reason for the obvious decline in the number and depth of U.S. reviews about the work’s Bayreuth performances. After 1896, the cycle was featured more consistently at the Festival—1897, 1899, 1901, 1902, etc.—but the production remained essentially unchanged until 1933, and thus was of diminishing interest to the media.20 Nevertheless, American critics still touted the unique aspects of the Festival’s setting for the ideal presentation and reception of the composer’s operas. They continued to uphold the Festival productions as models of

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19 Boston Daily Advertiser, 7 Aug 1896, 6. Indeed, as Dietrich Mack has observed, the rehearsal piano scores for the 1896 production were filled with explanatory notes that dictated scenic clarity, dialogue style, and the complete agreement between the music and stage action.

20 At the 1897 Festival, three complete Ring cycles were given, along with eight performances of Parsifal; in 1899, the Ring was performed twice, while Parsifal and Die Meistersinger were performed seven and five times, respectively. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Ring was performed twice during the 1901 and the 1902 Festivals.
*Gesamtkunstwerk* for future American stagings of the *Ring*, even though in their view, Cosima’s ideas were entirely her own, and not Wagner’s. As Sanderson of the *Daily Advertiser* mused:

*The operas* seem greater and far more interesting here than in either Dresden or Munich, where I have seen them splendidly given. Here they are more sacred, a Wagner shrine. The dramas could not be so presented anywhere else. The arrangement of the stage settings, the absolutely perfect mechanism, the depth required and height, the fine effects of color and subdued lighting, etc., etc., all combine to make a perfect tout ensemble.

If anything, U.S. critics preferred to report on the increased number of Americans to Bayreuth; following the 1897 Festival, a journalist for the *New York Times* noted that “…there is an artistic excitement about the pilgrimage to Baireuth, a complete absorption in Wagner, an utter exclusion of everything else, which appeals to foreigners…”\(^{21}\) In their opinion, American visitors were vital to the Festival’s survival. They bragged that of the Bayreuth tourists, Americans were among the most “committed and thorough” of the “Wagnerites”. By the end of the nineteenth century, the journey across the Atlantic to the *Festspielhaus* had become an established status symbol of cultural progress and elevation, one that, as the *Times*’ critic put it, was recognized by “any educated man or woman throughout the civilized world”.

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By all appearances, the increased number of Americans to Bayreuth in 1896 does not seem to indicate anything of a decline in American interest in Wagner’s music, including his *Ring*. Back in the U.S., however, the performance of the composer’s operas was being actively affected by various social forces which appear to encompass the changing opinions about the position of German music and musicians in American musical culture. As Jessica Gienow-Hecht has observed in her study *Sound Diplomacy*, the last decade of the nineteenth century was characterized by “a growing dilemma in American music circles, between a continuing admiration for Europe as the center of Western culture and an intensifying cultural

\(^{21}\) *New York Times*, 10 Sep 1897, 7.
As articles in journals and the daily press from that period reveal, along with “aggressive demands for an independent American national music”, there was also a “growing antagonism toward the preponderance of German music and musicians in the United States” (French and Italian music, on the other hand, was regarded as benign). While Gienow-Hecht shows how these attitudes specifically affected American orchestras and the orchestral repertory performed, it should be remembered that the American production of German opera, especially works by Wagner, was not untouched by this issue. We know that after the end of the German seasons in 1891, the Metropolitan Opera’s directors and stockholders curtailed the performance of the composer’s operas on the house’s stage, limiting productions to those of only Tannhäuser and Lohengrin. These works, probably deemed acceptable because they were arguably the most popular with Americans, were likely also regarded as less “Germanic” than operas such as those of the Ring cycle. Moreover, by giving them in Italian translation, the works were further divested of their “German-ness”, despite the fact that Americans were already quite familiar with hearing them performed in the original language.

This initiative did not last long, since by 1894, it became clear to the managers of the Metropolitan’s resident company that they could not remain financially viable without performing more Wagner. The rest of the composer’s works eventually returned to the repertory in the late 1890s, but in 1903, when Heinrich Conried assumed management of the company, the Metropolitan Opera’s stockholders once more sought to limit the amount of Wagner’s operas being performed. For one, they made the new impresario agree to keep the number of performances of the composer's works to no more than forty percent of the season’s total; moreover, they insisted he abstain from—or severely limit—staging Wagner operas on Monday nights, which was the house’s “official society night.” Eventually, anti-German sentiment in the U.S. found a devastating focus with World War I and America’s entry into it, negatively affecting

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22 Sound Diplomacy, 154.
the lives of German-American musicians and the Germanic repertoire performed in concert halls and opera houses. Immediately after the war, all Wagner was banned from the Metropolitan Opera House. Gradually, his works made their way back into the performing repertory: first with a production of *Parsifal* in English in 1920; then *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde*, also in English, in 1921; and finally, the entire *Ring* cycle in 1925. In sum, the complex social situation of German-American relations within the U.S. surrounding the American production and reception of Wagner opera in the early twentieth century remains to be unpacked by historians. Importantly, the situation at the Metropolitan Opera during this period warrants investigation from this angle, for it was at this time that the institution was coming to terms with its German-American history, essentially having established itself as the country’s premier opera house based on its capacity to stage Wagner opera.

The political and social forces described above ultimately could not stop Wagner’s works from their gradual assimilation into the American operatic repertory. After the German seasons at the Metropolitan Opera, while Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau struggled to keep their company afloat by performing predominantly French and Italian operas (plus *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*), Walter Damrosch proved there was still American demand for Wagner’s later works such as *Tristan und Isolde* and the operas of the *Ring*. Yet, he soon discovered that his company could not thrive on performing operas solely, or even mostly, by Wagner. Maurice Grau learned the same lesson. They came to realize that for grand opera to survive as an institution, Wagner’s works had to be incorporated into a broader repertory of French, Italian, and German opera, of which all three types would be performed in a single season. This reorganization further cemented the art form, in this multinational vein, as “high culture”.

We should also not forget that German-language opera in general continued to be performed at venues other than the Metropolitan Opera; there was still a thriving German theatre scene in *Kleindeutschland* throughout the 1890s and into the early twentieth century. However, the key difference in the case of Wagner opera was that the composer’s works were
not reabsorbed back into this German-immigrant environment, but were performed now only at major opera houses such as the Metropolitan Opera, which had the artistic and financial resources to stage them.

Such cultural processes eventually shaped the establishment of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle as a symbol of opera as a high-art institution (one need only think of operatic culture as sometimes embodied in the image of a Valkyrie with the caption, “it ain’t over until the fat lady sings”). Perhaps more so than any other operatic work, the *Ring*’s performance and reception history has, since the late nineteenth century, become intertwined with the history of specific cities all over the world and have even defined the development of their operatic institutions. Because of the monumental nature of the work and the inherent challenges of staging it, only opera companies with substantial resources are able stage it. Even by the end of the nineteenth century, both Damrosch and Grau realized that it did not make good financial or artistic sense to tour with the cycle, since this often required sacrificing the quality of the production. After 1903, the complete *Ring* was never taken on tour by any American opera company again. As one of the few theatres which could stage the *Ring*, the Metropolitan Opera in New York became a kind of “North American Bayreuth” to which Americans had to make a journey to see performances of the tetralogy. Gradually though, institutions in other cities began to mount their own productions, starting with Chicago in 1915. Today, while Bayreuth is still a unique setting in which to experience the *Ring* cycle, it is far from the only destination to which audiences make pilgrimages to experience the work. With a growing number of indigenous productions being given in more than a dozen cities in the United States and all over the world, Wagner’s *Ring* has become a truly international work of art.
## APPENDIX A. Americans at the 1876 Bayreuth Festival.

### A.1. Americans on the extant 1876 *Fremdenlisten.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of attendees</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Residence in Bayreuth</th>
<th>Fremdenlisten No. and Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balch, R. William</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Friedrichstr. 435</td>
<td>4; 17 August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake, Anna S.C.</td>
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<td>Boston</td>
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<tr>
<td>B[aj]xter, Sylvester</td>
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<td>Boston</td>
<td>Friedrichstr. 435</td>
<td>4; 17 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bradlee, Jonet</td>
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<td>Boston</td>
<td>Brautgasse 154</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase, Theodor</td>
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<td>Rentier</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crane, Albert</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Advokat</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Neuenweg 713</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dachauer, Louis [Leopold]</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Neuenweg 713</td>
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<td>Damrosch</td>
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<td>Dixey, R.C., mit Familie</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10; 23 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federlein, Gottlieb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fischer, Sa[rah] Miss</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>10; 23 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grauer, Robert</td>
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<td>Griswolf, Miss Louise</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1; 14 August</td>
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<td>Kaufmann</td>
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<td>Holland, Florence, Miss</td>
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<td>Kip, William J.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Klauser, Karl</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tonkünstler</td>
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<td>Maxstrasse 54</td>
<td>4; 17 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korbay, [Francis]</td>
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<td>Künstler [Pianist and tenor]</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Brandenburgerstr. 23</td>
<td>1; 14 August</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*To show the most complete data, I have provided additional information in this table, demarcated by square brackets, that was not printed on the original lists. Errors are explained in the footnotes.

1 “Maxstrasse” is an abbreviation for “Maximilienstrasse”.
2 This is a duplicate entry with a spelling error. See “Twombly, Alice”.
3 Minnie Hauk was American-born but registered as coming from Berlin, presumably where she was then working as an opera singer.
4 “Huntington” is probably a mis-spelling of “Huntington.” See also note 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of attendees</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Residence in Bayreuth</th>
<th>Fremdenlisten No. and Date</th>
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<td>6; 21 August</td>
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<td>Livingston, L., mit Frau</td>
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<td>[Unknown]</td>
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<td>[Unknown]</td>
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<td>St[oeck]kel, Gustave J.</td>
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<td>Banquier</td>
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<td>4; 17 August</td>
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<td>Boston</td>
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<td>7; 22 August</td>
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<td>Frankfurt a. M.</td>
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<td>4; 17 August</td>
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5 This is a duplicate entry for F.G. Huntington (misspelled again) and his wife. See note 3.
6 Stöckel’s last name was erroneously recorded on the Fremdenlisten as “Strickel.”
7 This is presumably the entry for “Alice Twombly” but her residence address in Bayreuth should have been registered as “Maxstrasse 16.” See note 2.

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<th>Das Rheingold</th>
<th>Die Walküre</th>
<th>Siegfried</th>
<th>Götterdämmerung</th>
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<td>5 Sep, 5</td>
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<td>17 Sep, 12</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Oct, 12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B. Arrangements of Music from the *Ring* Cycle Published, Listed and Sold in the 1887 Catalogue of B. Schott Söhne.

Das Rheingold

Other Orchestral Excerpts and Arrangements:
Einzug der Götter in Walhall, für Orchester zum Concertvortrag bearb. von H. Zumpe. Partitur und Orchesterstimmen

Piano score editions (with voice parts):
----. No.1. Gesang der 3 Rheintöchter (2 Soprane und Alt).
----. No. 2. Erda’s Warnung an Wotan (Alt).
----. No. 3. Loge’s Gesang “Immer ist Undank” (Tenor).
(Deutsch u. engl. Text).

Piano score editions (without voice parts):
Clavier-Auszug zu 2 Händen.
Clavier-Auszug zu 4 Händen.
Tonbilder mit erläuterndem, unterlegtem und verbindendem Texte, für Pianoforte.

Excerpts and Arrangements for Piano:
Vorspiel (Ouverture) für Pianoforte.
_____ für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Einzug der Götter in Walhall für 2 Pianoforte zu 8 Händen, bearb. von A. Horn.
_____ Rêvue mélodique p. Piano à 4 mains.
Brassin, L. Walhall, frei übertr. für Pianoforte.
Cramer, H. Potpourri für Piano.
_____ Potpourri für Piano à 4 mains.
_____ Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte.
_____ Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Dörtling, Cl. Motive, leicht bearb. für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Heintz, A. Angereihte Perlen für Pianoforte.

Piano score editions (without voice parts):
Clavier-Auszug zu 2 Händen.
Clavier-Auszug zu 4 Händen.
Tonbilder mit erläuterndem, unterlegtem und verbindendem Texte für Pianoforte. In 3 Theilen.
Jaell, A. Op. 120. Erste Scene für Pianoforte.
Langhans, L. Loge’s Erzählung für Pianoforte.
Liszt, F. Walhall, Transcription für Pianoforte.
Rupp, H. Fantasie für Pianoforte.

Arrangements for other instruments:
Wichtl, G. Petit Duo pour Piano et Violin.
Popp, W. Transcription für Flöte und Pianoforte.

***

Die Walküre

Other Orchestral Excerpts and Arrangements:

Piano score editions (with voice parts):
----. No. 1. Ein Schwert verhiess mir der Vater, Tenor.
----. No. 2. Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond (deutsch und englisch), Tenor.
----. _____, für Bariton (deutsch und englisch).
----. No. 3. Siegmund! sieh’ auf mich, Sopran und Tenor.
----. No. 4. War es so schmalich, was ich verbrach? Sopran und Bass.
----. No. 4b. Wotan’s Abschied.
APPENDIX B, cont’d.

---. Livret.
---. No. 2. Chant d’amour de Sigmond (Ténor). “L’ombre fuit, les asters du ciel immense.”
---. _____ pour Baryton.

Excerpts and Arrangements for Piano:
Vorspiel (Ouverture) für Pianoforte.
_____ für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Der Ritt der Walküren, für Orchester zum Concertvortrag eingerichtet. Für Pianoforte.
_____ für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
_____ für 2 Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Wotan’s Abschied von Brünnhilde und Feuerzauber, für Orchester zum Concertvortrag eingerichtet. Für Pianoforte.
_____ für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
_____ für 2 Pianoforte zu 8 Händen.
Beyer, F. Répertoire des jeunes Pianistes pour Piano
_____ Revue mélodique pour Piano à 4 mains.
Brassin, L. Tonstücke, frei übertragen für Pianoforte.
_____ No. 2. Siegmund’s Liebesgesang.
_____ No. 3. Feuerzauber.
_____ No. 4. Der Ritt der Walküren.
Cramer, H. Potpourri für Pianoforte.
_____ Potpourri für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
_____ Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte.
_____ Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Dörstling, Ch. Motive, leicht bearbeitet für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Gregoir, J. Transcription für Pianoforte.
Heintz, A. Angereihte Perlen, für Pianoforte.
Heft I. Erster Aufzug.
Heft II. Zweiter Aufzug.
Heft III. Dritter Aufzug.
_____ Liebeslied und Zwiegesang des Wälsungenpaares (Siegmund und Sieglinde) für Pianoforte.
Leitert, G. Op. 27. Souvenir pour Piano.

Rubinstein, Jos. Musikalische Bilder für Pianoforte:
No. 1. Siegmund und Sieglinde.
No. 2. Wotan’s Zorn und Abschied von Brünnhilde.

Piano score editions (without voice parts):
Clavier-Auszug zu 2 Händen.
Clavier-Auszug zu 4 Händen.
Tonbilder mit erläuterndem, unterlegtem und verbindendem Texte für Pianoforte.
_____ Musikalische Bilder für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen:
No. 1. Siegmund und Sieglinde.
No. 2. Wotan’s Zorn und Abschied von Brünnhilde.
Rupp. H. Siegmund’s Liebesgesang, Transcription für Pianoforte.
_____ Siegmund’s Liebesgesang, Transcription für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
_____ Fantasie für Pianoforte.
_____ Der Ritt der Walküren für Pianoforte.
_____ Der Ritt der Walküren für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
_____ Siegmund’s Liebesgesang für Pianoforte.

Arrangements for other instruments:
Gregoir, J. und Léonard, H. Duo für Pianoforte und Violine.
Grimm, C. Siegmund’s Liebesgesang für Violoncell und Pianoforte.
Kastner, E. Reminiscenzen für Harmonium.
Oberthür, C. Siegmund’s Liebesgesang für Harfe.
_____ Siegmund’s Liebesgesang für Zither.
Popp, W. Transcription für Flöte und Pianoforte.
Ritter, H. Siegmund’s Liebesgesang für Viola und Pianoforte.
Wichtl, G. Petit Duo pour Piano et Violon.
Wickede, F. von. Lyrische Stücke für Pianoforte und Violine:
_____ No. 3. Siegmund’s Liebesgesang.
_____ Dasselbe für Violoncell und Pianoforte.

****
APPENDIX B, cont'd.

**Siegfried**

**Other Orchestral Excerpts and Arrangements:**
Waldweben, für Orchester zum Concertvortrag eingerichtet. Partitur und Orchesterstimmen.

**Piano score editions (with voice parts):**
----. No. 1. Es sangen die Vögelin (Tenor).
----. No. 2. Nothung! Nothung! Neidliches Schwert (Tenor).
----. No. 3. Hoho! Hoho! Schmiede mein Hammer (Tenor).
----. No. 4. Al, was ist das für ein müüssiger Tand (Tenor).
----. No. 5. Wache Wala! Wala (Bass).

**Excerpts and Arrangements for Piano:**
Vorspiel (Ouverture) für Pianoforte.
Beyer, F. Répertoire des jeunes Pianistes pour Piano.
Brassin, L. Waldweben, frei übertragen für Pianoforte.
Cramer, H. Potpourri für Pianoforte.
   . Potpourri für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
   . Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte.
   . Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Heintz, A. Angereihte Perlen, für Pianoforte. In 4 Heften.
   . Siegfried’s Feuerdurchschreitung und Erweckung der Brünnhilde. Episode für Pianoforte.
Rubinstein, Jos. Musikalische Bilder für Pianoforte:
   I. Siegfried und der Waldvogel.
   II. Siegfried und Brünnhilde.
   . Musikalische Bilder für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen:
      I. Siegfried und der Waldvogel.
      II. Siegfried und Brünnhilde.
Rupp. H. Fantasie für Pianoforte.
   . Waldweben für Pianoforte.

**Arrangements for other instruments:**
Pringsheim, A. Siegfried und der Waldvogel. Episode bearbeiten für Pianoforte, 2 Violinen, Viola und Violoncell.
Wichtl, G. Petit Duo pour Piano et Violon.
Wilhelmj, A. Paraphrase für Violine und Pianoforte.

**Götterdämmerung**

**Other Orchestral Excerpts and Arrangements:**

**Piano score editions (with voice parts):**
----. No. 2. Gesang der drei Rheintöchter (2 Soprane und Alt).

**Piano score editions (without voice parts):**
Clavier-Auszug zu 2 Händen.
Clavier-Auszug zu 4 Händen.
Tonbilder mit erläuterndem, unterlegtem und verbindendem Texte für Pianoforte, in 2 Theilen.

**Excerpts and Arrangements for Piano:**
Vorspiel (Ouverture) für Pianoforte, einger. von A. Heintz.
Trauer-Marsch beim Tode Siegfried’s für Pianoforte (Cramer).
   . für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen (Cramer).
   . für Pianoforte (Heintz).
   . für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen (Heintz).
   . für 2 Pianoforte zu 4 Händen (Ehrlich).
   . für 2 Pianoforte zu 8 Händen (Rupp).
   . für Pianoforte und Violine (Hermann).
   . für Pianoforte und Violoncell (Hermann).
APPENDIX B, cont'd.

Trauer-Marsch beim Tode Siegfried’s und Brünnhilde’s Klagegesang für die Orgel zum Concertgebrauch übertragen von E. Stehle.
Beyer, F. Répertoire des jeunes Pianistes pour Piano.
_____ Revue mélodique pour Piano à 4 mains.
Brassin, L. Waldweben, frei übertragen für Pianoforte.
Cramer, H. Potpourri für Pianoforte.
_____ Potpourri für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
_____ Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte.
_____ Leichte Tonstücke für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen.
Heintz, A. Angereihte Perlen, für Pianoforte:
   Heft I. Vorspiel.
   Heft II. Erster Aufzug.
   Heft III. Zweiter Aufzug.
   Heft IV. Dritter Aufzug.
_____ Op. 165. 2. Transcription für Pianoforte.
Rubinstein, Jos. Musikalische Bilder für Pianoforte:
   I. Siegfried und die Rheintöchter.
_____ Musikalische Bilder für Pianoforte zu 4 Händen:
   I. Siegfried und die Rheintöchter.
Rupp. H. Fantasie für Pianoforte.

Arrangements for other instruments:
Oberthür, C. Gesang der Rheintöchter für Harfe und Pianoforte.
Seidl, A. Siegfried’s Rheinfahrt. Tonbild für Pianoforte, 2 Violinen, Viola, Violoncell und Contrabass.
Wichtl, G. Petit Duo pour Piano et Violon.
Zumpe, H. Siegfried’s Rheinfahrt, eingerichtet für Pianoforte, Violine und Violoncell.
APPENDIX C. John Philip Sousa and the Music of the *Ring* for Concert Band.

C.1. Transcriptions from Wagner’s *Ring* Cycle performed by John Sousa’s Band in the United States, 1893–1927.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ring Cycle Excerpt</th>
<th>Years performed</th>
<th>New York City venues</th>
<th>Chicago venues</th>
<th>Boston venues</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Das Rheingold</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla</td>
<td>1895 1896 1901 1902 1904 1923</td>
<td>22nd Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Broadway Theatre</td>
<td>Columbia Theatre</td>
<td>Boston Opera House</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carnegie Hall</td>
<td>Columbian Exposition</td>
<td>Boston Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Casino Theatre</td>
<td>Haymarket Theatre</td>
<td>Colonial Theatre</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Columbus Theatre</td>
<td>Hooley’s Theatre</td>
<td>Mechanics’ Hall</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Central Palace</td>
<td>Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Manufacturers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hammerstein’s Olympia</td>
<td>Exposition</td>
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<td>Harlem Opera House</td>
<td>People’s Theatre</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Herald Square Theatre</td>
<td>Prides Crossing</td>
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<td>Hippodrome</td>
<td>Symphony Hall</td>
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<td>Tremont Temple</td>
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<td>Metropolitan Opera House</td>
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<td>Star Theatre</td>
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<td>West End Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Die Walküre</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Siegmund’s Love Song</td>
<td>1893</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to Act II</td>
<td>1902</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ride of the Valkyries (Der Ritt die Walküre); band number or vocal solo</td>
<td>1893 1894 *1895 1896 *1897 1901 1902 1905 1907 1908 *1911 1923 1924 1925 1926</td>
<td>20th Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Auditory</td>
<td>Columbia Theatre</td>
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<td>Haymarket Theatre</td>
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<td>Exposition</td>
<td>Exposition</td>
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<td>People’s Theatre</td>
<td>People’s Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Prides Crossing</td>
<td>Prides Crossing</td>
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<td>Symphony Hall</td>
<td>Symphony Hall</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Tremont Temple</td>
<td>Tremont Temple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wotan’s Farewell</td>
<td>1905 1907 1908 *1911</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magic Fire Music (Fire Charm) (Charm Music)</td>
<td>1893 1894 *1895 1896 *1897 1901 1902 1905 1907 1908 *1911</td>
<td>20th Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1909 1910</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selections</td>
<td>1893 1895 1897 1898 1899 *1900 1901 1902 1903 1904 1907 1908 *1911 1912 1913 1914 1915 1924 1927</td>
<td>22nd Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>20th Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Manufacturers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Siegfried</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Forge-Song (Schmiedeliede) (Smith Scene)</td>
<td>*1907 1908 1922</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forest Echoes (Forest Murmurs) (Forest Sounds) (Waldweben)</td>
<td>1901 1909 1910</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Scene</td>
<td>1904</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selections</td>
<td>1894 1895 *1896 *1897 1898 *1899 1900 1901 1902 1903 1904 1905 *1906 1907 1910 *1911 1912 1913 1914 1915 1917</td>
<td>22nd Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22nd Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
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<td>Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Manufacturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Götterdämmerung</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Siegfried’s Rhine Journey</td>
<td>1898 1902 1923</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siegfried’s Death and Funeral March (Siegfried’s Tod) (Funeral March)</td>
<td>*1895 1896 1897 1898 *1899 1900 1901 1902 1904 1905 1907 1908 *1911 1912 1913 1914 1915 1916 1923 1924</td>
<td>22nd Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<td>Auditorium</td>
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<td>Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Manufacturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selections</td>
<td>1894 1898 1901 1904 1905 1912</td>
<td>22nd Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>22nd Regiment Armory</td>
<td>Auditorium</td>
<td>Boston Food Fair</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* = played repeatedly on tour. Compiled from Paul E. Bierley’s *The Incredible Band of John Philip Sousa*, Appendices I (pp. 143–194) and V (pp. 420–421).
**APPENDIX C, cont’d.**

C.2. List of Extant Transcriptions Performed by Sousa and his Band held at the Sousa Archives and The Center for American Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location in Archive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Das Rheingold</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla”, arranger unknown. Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, n.d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Die Walküre</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ride of the Valkyries”. Original manuscript score by John Philip Sousa, 1907.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wotan’s Farewell and Firecharm”, arranger unknown. Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, n.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Valkyrie”, selected and arranged by William Short. London: Schott and Co., [19-7].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grosse Fantasie on Die Walküre, arranged by Arthur Seidel. Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, [18-7].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grosse Fantasie on Die Walküre, arranged by Arthur Seidel. Hannover: Louis Oertel, n.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Walküre von R. Wagner—Tonbilder, arranger unknown. Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, n.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Siegfried</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Schmiededieder aus Siegfried”, arranged by Alfons Abbass. Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, [1901].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Waldweben”, arranged by G. Goldschmidt. Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, [1902].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grosse Fantasie on Siegfried, arranged by Arthur Seidel. Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, n.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegfried Idyll, arranged by F.W. Ecke. N.p., [19-].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Götterdämmerung</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Siegfried’s Rheinfahrt”, arranged by Herbert L. Clarke. Based on Wagner’s orchestral version (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1874).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Siegfried’s Funeral March, arranger unknown. Based on Wagner’s orchestral version (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1874).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX D. Transcription of Anton Seidl’s Notebook of stage directions for the first performances of  
Der Ring des Nibelungen, Bayreuth, 1876.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 1 (verso): [Blank]</th>
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<tr>
<th>Page 2 (recto):</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anton Seidl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayreuth I Nibelungenjahr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton Seidl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayreuth I Nibelung Year</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 3 (verso):</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proben angefangen am 3ten Juni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Scenenproben mit den 3 Rheintöchterwägen haben am 30ten Mai begonnen mit Klavierbegleitung. Freitag, den 2ten Juni waren wir fertig, Sonnabend legten sich die 3 Rheintöchter zum erstenmale in die Eisenreife, und sangen prachtvoll; Gelingen war’s, wie noch nie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsals began on the third of June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scenic rehearsals of the 3 Rheindaughter wagons began on the 30th of May with piano accompaniment. We were ready on Friday, the 2nd of June, Saturday, the 3 Rheindaughters laid themselves for the first time in the iron rings and sang gorgeously; It was a success, like never before.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 4 (recto):

Das Rheingold.

Scenische Bemerkungen.

Das Rheingold.

Scenic notes.

Page 5 (verso):

von der Cellofigur¹

sind 16 takte bis zum Hoboeneintritt
dann 40 Takte bis zum
Einsatz der Woglinde.²

from the cello figures

[there] are 16 measures until the oboes’ entrance
then 40 measures until the
entrance of Woglinde

Page 6 (recto):

Wie die Hoboen das Thema:³

bringen, geht der Vorhang auf.⁴
Woglinde kreist (anfang 3 ab) 2mal um das
Riff herum. Beim 3tenmal, wie
die aufsteigende Bassfigur kommt,⁵

When the oboes play the theme:

the curtain goes up.
Woglinde circles (begin 3 from) twice around the rocky ledge. At
the third time, when
the rising bass figure comes,

1 Scene 1, m. 81.
2 Oboes enter at Scene 1, m. 97. Woglinde begins singing at m. 137.
3 Scene 1, mm. 97–98.
4 This is about 30 measures earlier than Wagner’s direction in the printed score, in which he indicated that the curtain should go up at mm. 126–27, five measures
before the scalar figures prior to Woglinde’s entrance, “Weia! Waga!”
5 Scene 1, m. 131.
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 6 (recto), cont’d.

Im ganzen haben wir 40 Takte lang Zeit.)

schwimmt sie langsam von links hervor. gang ab.

U.S.W. ⁶

Wellgunde von links (oben)

Wellg. (Woglinde wachst du allein?) ⁷ umdrehen ⁸

Mit Wellgunde wir ich zu zweit

(Schnell um fort nach rechts!) ¹¹

(in total, we have time of 40 measures long.)

she swims slowly forth from the left. Exit.

[Weia, Waga, Welter, you wave,] and so on

Wellgunde from left (above)

Wellg. (Woglinde, watching alone?) turn around

[With Wellgunde there would be two of us!]

[Safe from your reach]

(Quickly continue to the right!)

---

⁶ Scene 1, mm. 137–38.
⁷ Scene 1, mm. 145–46; Wagner’s directions here indicate that Wellgunde’s voice is “from above.”
⁸ Wagner’s stage directions here for Wellgunde are: “Sie taucht aus der Flut zum Riff herab.” (She dives down through the waves to the rocky ledge.)
⁹ Scene 1, mm. 147–48; sung by Woglinde.
¹⁰ Scene 1, mm. 149–50; sung by Woglinde.
¹¹ According to Wagner’s stage directions, Woglinde is to swim away from Wellgunde here (“Sie entweicht ihr schwimmend.”)
Flosshilde from the right (above.)
Heiala weia! High-spirited sisters and so on

At:

Turn around, return
behind the rocky ledge again
turn around and from left
come towards the front,
stops completely on the right!

High up during the last
game passages. Gazing down as
Alberich shouts.
Ha ha! You nixies!

12 Scene 1, mm. 152–53; Flosshilde’s voice is “from above.”
13 Scene 1, mm. 158–59 (Flosshilde).
14 Scene 1, mm. 163–65 (Flosshilde).
15 Scene 1, mm. 185 (Alberich).
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 10 (recto):

[Hey! Who is there?] [Violins] (down.)

auf.

[Ugh! The foul creature!]

Page 11 (verso): [Blank]

Page 12 (recto):

2e Scene.

Second Scene.

Page 13 (verso):

Nebel zert[he]ilen. 18

Mist disperses.

---

16 Scene 1, mm. 192–94; m. 192 (Woglinde). Woglinde dives down here with her sisters as according to Wagner’s stage directions, “Sie tauchen tiefer herauf und erkennene den Nibelung” (They dive down deeper and see the Nibelung).

17 Scene 1, m. 196 (Woglinde and Wellgunde).

18 Seidl indicates that the steam curtain in the transition to Scene 2 begins to disperse at the symbol indicated in the score written out on the facing page (p. 14).
2nd Scene

[All is free from mist]

19 Transition from Scene 1 to Scene 2, mm. 744–68. As indicated by \(\Theta\), the steam begins to disperse at the violin figures beginning in m. 751. Wagner’s stage directions indicate: “Allmählich sind die Wogen in Gewölk übergegangen, welches, als eine immer heller dämmernde Beleuchtung dahintertritt, zu feinerem Nebel sich abklärt.” (Gradually the waves turn into clouds, which resolve into a fine mist as an increasingly bright light emerges behind them.) At mm. 759–60, Wagner’s stage directions indicate: “Als der Nebel, in zarten Wölkchen, sich ganzlich in der Höhe verliert, wird, im Tagesgrauen, eine freie Gegend auf Bergesöhöhen sichtbar.” (When the mist has completely disappeared from the top of the stage in the form of delicate little clouds, an open space on a mountain summit becomes visible in the dawning light.)
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 15 (verso):

Fahle Nebel.  

Loge: dort schlüpfe mit mir hinein. (Schwefeldampf.)

Piano: 12 Takte. | 4 Takte anfangen Fortissimo.

Ambose.

Violen.

Scene 2, mm. 1660–69. At m. 1669, Wagner’s stage directions indicate: “Ein fahler Nebel erfüllt mit wachsender Dichtheit die Bühne; in ihm erhalten die Götter ein zunehmend bleiches und ältliches Aussehen.” (A pale mist, growing gradually denser, fills the stage so that the gods acquire a wan and aged appearance.)

Scene 2, mm. 1786–87. Wagner’s stage directions in the score indicate at m. 1787, “Er geht voran und verschwindet seitwärts in einer Kluft, aus der sogleich ein schwefliger Dampf hervorquillt.” (He leads the way and disappears sideways into a crevice from which sulphurous vapours immediately start to seep.)

Transition from Scene 2 to Scene 3, mm. 1853–77. Seidl’s notes match Wagner’s dynamic markings for the anvil passage (mm. 1862–77), beginning at piano, then crescendos over twelve bars to fortissimo, at which it remains for four bars.

522
3e Scene  
Nacht und Nebel  
Niemand gleich  
bis zum Kopf  
ab.  

Alberich.  
Hoho! Hoho! Hört ihn,  
er naht: der Niblungen-Herr  
Versenkung ab. (ganz.)

Loge: Dort die Kröte,  
greife sie rasch  
Halb auf.  

---

Transition from Scene 2 to Scene 3, mm. 1878–89; orchestra enters at m. 1878. In the score, the anvils should *diminuendo* while the violins and violas continue to play the anvil rhythms in a gradual *crescendo* to *fortissimo*. Seidl’s notes suggest that he directed the anvil players.

Scene 3, mm. 1961–64. Here, Alberich puts the tarnhelm on his head and transforms himself into a column of mist. Wagner indicates that “seine Gestalt verschwindet; statt ihrer gewährt man eine Nebelsäule.” (Alberich disappears and in his place can be seen a column of mist.)

Scene 3, mm. 2005–10. Following Alberich’s exclamation, Wagner’s directions indicate that the column of mist disappears towards the back of the stage, and Alberich’s voice can be heard receding into the distance, venting fury as he goes. (“Die Nebelsäule verschwindet dem Hintergrunde zu: man hört in immer weiterer Ferne die tobende Ankunft Alberich’s.”)

Scene 3, mm. 2720–29. During these measures, Wagner’s directions indicate that Alberich disappears, and the gods become aware of a toad creeping towards them over the stones. (“Er [Alberich] verschwindet: die Götter gewahren im Gestein eine Kröte auf sich zukriechen.”)
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 17 (verso):

Loge: Hold him fast, until I’ve bound him.

Loge: Halt ihn fest, bis ich ihn band.

gleich ganz auf.  

7 Takte.  

7 measures.

Page 18 (recto):

Scene 3, mm. 2731–33. Following Loge’s statement, Wagner’s directions read: “Wotan setzt seinen Fuss auf die Kröte: Loge fährt ihr nach dem Kopfe und hält den Tarnhelm in der Hand.” (Wotan places his foot on the toad: Loge seizes it by the head and takes the tarnhelm in his hand.)

Scene 3, mm. 2737–38. Following Loge’s statement, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that Alberich has suddenly become visible in his own form, writhing beneath Wotan’s foot (“Alberich ist plötzlich in seiner wirklichen Gestalt sichtbar geworden, wie er sich unter Wotans Fuβe windet.”)

Scene 3, mm. 2745–51.

27 Scene 3, mm. 2731–33. Following Loge’s statement, Wagner’s directions read: “Wotan setzt seinen Fuss auf die Kröte: Loge fährt ihr nach dem Kopfe und hält den Tarnhelm in der Hand.” (Wotan places his foot on the toad: Loge seizes it by the head and takes the tarnhelm in his hand.)

28 Scene 3, mm. 2737–38. Following Loge’s statement, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that Alberich has suddenly become visible in his own form, writhing beneath Wotan’s foot (“Alberich ist plötzlich in seiner wirklichen Gestalt sichtbar geworden, wie er sich unter Wotans Fuβe windet.”)

29 Scene 3, mm. 2745–51.
Appendix D, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 18 (recto), cont’d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>piano: 4 Takte crescendo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>f.</em> 4 Takte <em>dim.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Takte immer schwächer <em>pp</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vierte Scene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fourth Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>piano: 4 measures crescendo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>f.</em> 4 measures <em>dim.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 measures more and more faintly <em>pp</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 19 (verso):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wotan: Gönn ihm die geifernde Lust!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immer heller.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ff</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ganz hell. 33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complete bright.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wotan: Don't begrudge him his bilious pleasure!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kettledrums, violins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasingly brighter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ff</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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30 Transition from Scene 3 to Scene 4, mm. 2752–75. During this passage, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that the scene changes as before, but in reverse order. (”Die Scene verwandelt sich, nur in umgekehrter Weise, wie zuvor.”)

31 End of transition to Scene 4, mm. 2776–91; Seidl indicates the dynamic markers for this passage. Here, Wagner’s stage directions are: ”Die Verwandlung führt wieder an den Schmieden vorbei.” (Once again the change of scene leads past the forges.)

32 Scene 4, mm. 3206–51. At m. 3208, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that it continues to grow lighter. (”Es wird immer heller.”)

33 Scene 4, mm. 3252–56 (oboe). By m. 400, the front of the stage should be completely bright. The score indicates that this moment should occur three measures earlier; as Wagner’s directions in the score state: ”Der Vordergrund ist wieder ganz hell geworden; das Aussehen der Götter gewinnt durch das Licht wider die erste Frische: über dem Hintergrunde haftet jedoch noch der Nebelschleier, so daß die ferne Burg unsichtbar bleibt. Fasolt und Fafner treten auf, Freia zwischen sich führend. Fricka eilt freudig auf die Schwester zu.” (The front of the stage is now brightly lit again; the light restores the gods’ former youthful appearance; a veil of mist still hangs over the back of the stage, however, so that the distant castle is hidden. Fasolt and Fafner enter, leading Freia between them.)
Appendix D, cont’d.

**Page 20 (recto):**

Erda

**Page 21 (verso):** [Blank]

**Page 22 (recto):**

Erda:  
Dir rath' ich, meide den Ring!  
langsam ab. Das Blau dunkler  
Ich warnte dich, du weißt genug:, sinn in Sorg' und Furcht. ganz verschwinden.  

---

34 Scene 4, mm. 3452–56; Wagner’s stage directions here read: “Die Bühne hat sich von Neuem verfinstert.” (The stage has grown dark again.)

35 Scene 4, mm. 3456–60; the stage directions here read: “Aus der Felsklut zur Seite bricht ein bläulicher Schein hervor in ihm wird plötzlich Erda sichtbar, die bis zu halver Leibeshöhe aus der Tiefe aufsteigt.” (A bluish light breaks forth from a rocky fissure at one side and in it Erda suddenly appears, rising up to half her height.)

36 Scene 4, mm. 3495–97.

37 Scene 4, mm. 3505–08 and onwards. Beginning in m. 3511, the score indicates that: “Erda versinkt langsam an die Brust, während der bläuliche Schein zu dunklen beginnt.” (Erda sinks slowly down to chest height, as the bluish light begins to fade.)

38 Scene 4, mm. 3516–21. Wagner’s directions state that while Erda sings this passage, she continues to sink (“Erda im Versinken”) and after her last words, she
Appendix D, cont’d.

| Page 23 (verso): | Donner.  
Nach dem letzten Gewittermotiv  
4 Takte: Hammerschlag⁴⁹  
Mit Hammerschlag 4 Takte, dann  
Einsatz für Donner.⁴⁰  
+Gesdur: im zwölften Takt  
Einsatz für Froh.⁴¹ |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                 | Donner. After the final thunderstorm motive  
                 | 4 measures: Hammerblow  
With hammerblow 4 measures, then  
Donner’s [vocal] entrance.  
+G-flat major: in 12 measures  
Froh’s entrance. |

| Page 24 (recto): | [Blank] |

| Page 25 (verso): | [Blank] |

| Page 26 (recto): | Die Walküre  
Scenische Bemerkungen. |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                 | Die Walküre  
Scenic notes. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 27 (verso):</th>
<th>1ter Aufzug.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Act.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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39 Final thunderstorm motive occurs in mm. 3700–01; hammerblow occurs in m. 3706. Wagner’s stage directions here read: “Man hört seinen Hammerschlag schwer auf den Felsstein fallen.” (The blow of his hammer is heard striking the rock.)

40 Scene 4, mm. 3706–09; Donner’s entrance, “Bruder, hihehr!” is in m. 3710.

41 Scene 4, mm. 3713–24.
Appendix D, cont'd.

Page 28 (recto):

Donner 8 Takt lang

im 6ter Takt

dim. [42]

Page 29 (verso):

Second Act.

Page 30 (recto):

Wie Brünnhilde zum zweiter Male
“Hojotoho” singt

As Brünnhilde sings
“Hojotoho” for the second time,

42 Die Walküre, Act I Prelude, mm. 75–97. Following three measures of ascending sextuplets and triplets, 2-bar phrases of Donner’s motive alternate with drum rolls in the timpani (mm. 82–83, 86–87, 90–91, 94–95). Diminuendo begins in m. 90 (the sixth measure of Donner’s motive).

43 Act II, Scene 1, mm. 131–53. The chords notated above are played by the trombones in mm. 149–53 and the directions refer to Fricka’s entrance on her ram-drawn chariot. In the score, Wagner indicates: “In einem mit zwei Widdern bespannten Wagen langt Fricka aus der Schlucht auf dem Felsjoche an: dort hält sie rasch an und steigt aus.” (Fricka arrives on the mountain ridge from the gorge in a chariot drawn by two rams: here she stops abruptly and climbs out.)
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 31 (verso):

Fünfte Scene.
Siegmund: Nothung zahlt im den Zoll. 14 (measures)\(^44\)

In vierzehnten Takte:

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{In the 14th measure:} \\
&\quad \text{[Third quarter.]} \\
&\quad \text{[Thunder.]} \\
&\quad \text{[Fourth quarter.]} \\
&\quad \text{[Thunder.]}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{Im 22ten Takte.} \\
&\quad \text{[Second quarter.]} \\
&\quad \text{[Thunder.]} \\
&\quad \text{[Third quarter.]} \\
&\quad \text{[Fourth quarter.]} \\
&\quad \text{[Thunder.]}
\end{align*}\]

44 Act II, Scene 5, mm. 1898–912. Wagner’s stage directions indicate that during these fourteen measures, “Er eilt dem Hintergrunde zu, und verschwindet, auf dem Joche angekommen, sogleich in finstem Gewittergewölk, aus welchem alsbald Wetterleuchten aufblitzen.” (He hurries to the back of the stage and having, reached the ridge, disappears at once in the dark stormclouds, from which flashes of lightning immediately break forth.)

45 Act II, Scene 5, mm. 1913–17. In accordance with the score, Seidl probably intended to indicate the “15th” measure for m. 1913, not the “14th.” Thunder (trill in timpani) begins on the third quarter beat at fortissimo, then diminuendo over the next 4 measures.

46 Act II, Scene 5, mm. 1918–44. Wagner’s stage directions here are: “Starker Blitz und Donner” (violent lightning and thunder). In the 22nd measure (m. 1939), thunder (trill in timpani) begins on the fourth quarter beat at fortissimo, then diminuendo over the next 5 measures.
Appendix D, cont’d.

**Page 32 (recto):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>am Schluß. Wotan: Doch Brünnhilde, u.s.w. erreicht mein Roß ihre Flucht ---- (Blitz.) Donner</td>
<td>Conclusion. Wotan: But Brünnhilde, and so on once my horse overtakes her flight ---- (Lightning.) Thunder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Page 33 (verso):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3er Akt.</td>
<td>Third Act.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Page 34 (recto):** [Blank]

**Page 35 (verso):** [Blank]

**Page 36 (recto):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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47 Conclusion of Act II, Scene 5, mm. 2041–51. Following Wotan’s statement, Wagner indicates that Wotan “verschwindet mit Blitz und Donner.—Der Vorhang fällt schnell.” (He disappears amidst thunder and lightning. The curtain falls quickly.)
Appendix D, cont’d.

**Page 37 (verso):**

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Götterdämmerung.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Götterdämmerung.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1er Akt.</td>
<td>First Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jachmann:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jachmann:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So gut, und schlimm</td>
<td>For good or ill,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>es geh’, --- schling’</td>
<td>I wind the rope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ich das Seil,</td>
<td>and sing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>und singe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zwei.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Zwei.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singe, Schwester, dir</td>
<td>Sing, my sister, I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>werf’ ich’s zu: weißt</td>
<td>cast it to you, do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>du, wie das wird?</td>
<td>you know what will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grün.</strong></td>
<td><strong>荪.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Scheffzky.)</td>
<td>(Scheffzky.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eins.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Eins.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singe Schwester, dir</td>
<td>Singe Schwester, dir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>werf’ ich zu! Weißt</td>
<td>werf’ ich zu! Weißt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>du wei das wird?</td>
<td>du wei das wird?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zwei.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Zwei.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Es ragt die Burg.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Es ragt die Burg.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>[Bassoons:]</strong></th>
<th><strong>[One.]</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eins.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The names of the singers who portrayed the Norns are indicated on pp. 37–38 in Seidl’s notebook: Johanna Jachmann-Wagner (First Norn), Josephine Scheffzky (Second Norn), and Friederike Sadler-Grün (Third Norn). Seidl’s notes on these pages appear to relate to Wagner’s stage directions in the score; “Eins” and “Zwei” likely refer to the gestures of the Norns and the passing of the rope between them. Here in mm. 42–47 of the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, at “Eins”, the First Norn (Jachmann) is to unwind a golden rope from around herself and attach one end of it to a branch of the pine tree. (“Während sie eine goldenes Seil von sich löst, und mit dem eine Ende es an einen Ast der Tanne knüpft.”)

Prologue, mm. 105–109. The Third Norn (Grün) sings the text above but Wagner’s stage directions in the score here are for the Second Norn (Scheffzky): “Die Zweite Norn windet das ihr zugeworfene Seil um einen hervorspringenden Felstein am Eingange des Gemachs.” (The Second Norn winds the rope that has been thrown around a projecting rock at the entrance to the chamber.)

Prologue, mm. 147–54. The Second Norn (Scheffzky) sings the text below (in brackets); Wagner’s stage instructions here indicate that the Third Norn catches the rope and throws the end behind her (“Das Seil auffangend und dessen Ende hinter sich werfend”) as she begins to sing “Es ragt die Burg…”

---

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Spinne Schwester, und singe.

Eins: gleich zur Jachmann.
2 Takt Pausen. Zwei.

Jachmann: Dämmert der Tag?
oder leuchtet die Lohe?
Getrübt trägt sich mein
Blick;
nicht hell eracht’ ich das
heilig Alte da Loge einst
entbrannte in lichter
Gluth. Weißt du was
aus ihm ward?

(Scheffzky)

Grün

Scheffzky
Durch des Speeres Zauber ---
Eins. Weißt du was aus
ihm ward?

Zwei

Grün: Des zerschlag’nen Speeres ---

Spin, my sister, and sing.

One, same to Jachmann.
2 measures rest. Two.

Jachmann: Is daylight dawning?
Or is it the light of the fire?
Clouded, my sight plays tricks on
me;
I cannot see clearly
the hallowed past when Loge
once flared up in white-hot
flame. Do you know
what became of him?

(Scheffzky)

Grün

Scheffzky
By the spell of his spear ---
One. Do you know what will
come of him? Two
Grün: The shattered spear’s ---

---

51 Prologue, mm. 190–92; sung by the Third Norn; Wagner’s stage directions here indicate that she throws the rope to the Second Norn; the latter tosses it to the First, who unties it from the branch and attaches it to another bough (“Sie werft das Seil der szetien Norn zu; diese schwingt es der ersten hin, welche das Seil vom Zweige löst, und es an einen anderen Ast wieder anknüpft.”)

52 Prologue, mm. 193–94. Wagner’s stage directions here indicate that the First Norn is “looking behind her as she busies herself with the rope” as she sings the following passage, “Dämmert der Tag?”...

53 Prologue, mm. 195–206.

54 As the First Norn is singing “Weißt du, was aus ihm ward?” (mm. 204–206), the Second Norn (Scheffzky, here indicated in brackets) is to once again, wind the rope that has been thrown to her round the rock (“Die zweite Norn das zugeworfene Seil wieder um den Stein windend.”) At m. 207, the Second Norn begins to sing the following passage (mm. 207–34), “Durch des Speeres Zauber...”

55 At mm. 235–37, as she delivers the line “Weißt du was aus ihm ward?”, the Second Norn throws the rope to the Third Norn, who once again throws it behind her. (“Sie wirft das Seil der dritten Norn zu; diese wirft es wieder hinter sich.”)

56 Prologue, mm. 237–38.
---World-ash’s heaped-up logs. 2 measures pause
---If you want to know when that will be?

Sinking.
The three Norns:
An end to eternal wisdom!
Wise women no longer
tell the world their tidings. Descend,
to our mother, descend.

Dawn.
43 measures long.
The triplets in the violins
2 measures sunrise.
ff. Broad daylight.

57 Prologue, mm. 245–53. This passage is sung by the Third Norn (note: Seidl has incorrectly written “wie” instead of “wann” here). During the two measure “pause” (mm. 248–49), Wagner’s staging directions indicate that the Third Norn is to throw the rope back to the Second Norn, who then coils it and throws it back to the First Norn (“Sie wirft das Seil zurück; die zweite Norn windet es auf, und wirft es der ersten wieder zu.”)

58 Prologue, mm. 290–300. Wagner’s stage directions during this passage indicate that the Norns gather up the pieces of broken rope and bind themselves together with them (“Sie fassen die Stücke des zerrissenen Seiles und binden damit ihre Leiber aneinander.”) After the final “Hinab!”, Wagner indicates that the Norns disappear (“Sie verschwinden.”)

59 Prologue, mm. 305–53. During this passage, Wagner’s stage instructions are: “Wachsende Morgenröte; immer schwächeres Leuchten des Feuerscheines aus der Tiefe.” (Dawn. The sky begins to brighten and the fiery glow at the back of the stage grows increasingly faint.) The sun rises at mm. 347–49, reaching broad daylight by the fortissimo at m. 353. Wagner’s directions, however, indicate that full daylight is to be achieved earlier, at m. 349.
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 40 (recto):

Siegfried fort.

\[
\text{\begin{music}
\begin{music}\text{Siegfried fort.}\end{music}
\end{music}
\]

Vorhang ab.\textsuperscript{60}

Rheinfahrt.

Vorhang auf.

Siegfried off.

\[
\text{\begin{music}
\begin{music}\text{Siegfried off.}\end{music}
\end{music}
\]

Curtain down.

Rhine Journey.

Curtain up.

\textsuperscript{60} Prologue, mm. 705–16. At m. 717, Wagner’s stage instructions in the score indicate that the curtain must be lowered quickly. (“Hier muß der Vorhang so eben schnell herabgelassen worden sein.”)

\textsuperscript{61} End of Prologue, mm. 889–92. Wagner’s staging directions indicate that during these four last measures, the curtain is once again lifted. (“Während der letzten vier Takte ist der Vorhang wieder aufgezogen worden.”)
Appendix D, cont’d.

Page 41 (verso):

Nach Hagens Wacht.\(^{62}\)
Zwischenspiel.\(^{63}\)

After Hagen’s watch.
Interlude.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Zwischenspiel.} & \\
\text{Donner} & \\
\text{Pausen} & \\
\text{Donner} & \\
\text{Donner.} & \\
\text{\textit{f}} & \\
\end{align*}\]

---

\(^{62}\) End of Act I, Scene 2 (m. 923).

\(^{63}\) Orchestral interlude, end of Act I, Scene 2 to beginning of Scene 3; mm. 924–1016.

\(^{64}\) Act I, Scene 3, mm. 1025–43; thunder is indicated at mm. 1028–31 and mm. 1039–42. From mm. 1025–36, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that Brünnhilde covers the ring with kisses, overcome with joyful memories. Distant thunder is heard; she looks up and listens. She turns back to the Ring. (“Von wonnigen Erinnerungen ergriffen, bedeckt sie den Ring mit ihren Küssen. Ferner Donner läßt sich vernehmen; sie blickt auf und lauscht. Sie wendet sich wider zu dem Ringe.”) At mm. 1038, Wagner’s stage directions indicate that there is a distant flash of lightning (“Ein ferner Blitz”). Then at mm. 1039–42, Brünnhilde listens again and peers into the distance, from where a dark thundercloud can be seen approaching the edge of the rock. (“Brünnhilde lauscht von Neuem und späht nach der Ferne, von woher eine finstre Gewitterwolke dem Felsensaume zuzieht.”)

\(^{65}\) Act I, Scene 3, mm. 1083–90 (note that Seidl has simplified the rhythm of the oboe parts in mm. 1083–84). Wagner’s stage instructions here indicate that Brünnhilde plunges into the pinewood, from where a loud noise, like a clap of thunder, can be heard (“Sie stürmt in den Tann, von wo ein starkes Geräusch, gleich einem Gewitterschlage, sich vernehmen läßt.”)
Appendix D, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 42 (recto):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waltraute fort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Takte Pausen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donner 2. 2. 4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| [cresc.] f. [dim.] 
| Schnell hinunter, |
| Hörner hinten. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 42 (verso):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2er Akt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tromp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberich: auf, schnell.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Waltraute off. 6 measures pause.

| Thunder 2. 2. 4.  |
| [cresc.] f. [dim.] 
| Rapidly downward, |
| Homs in the background. |

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 43 (verso):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2er Akt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tromp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberich: auf, schnell.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hagen: Mir selbst schwör ich’s
---schweige die Sorge
Alberich: -- ab. Langsam

Hagen: To myself I swear it:
silence your care
Alberich: --- off stage. Slowly

---

66 Waltraute leaves the stage at m. 1517 in Act I, Scene 3. Underneath, Seidl appears to have indicated when thunder is to be heard again but his notes here do not quite correspond to the score. It is likely Seidl is referring to the timpani trills at mm. 1517–21 and mm. 1531–46. Wagner has specified in the score that the first trill (on F# and at forte) corresponds to Waltraute’s departure, when a stormcloud can be seen rising from the pinewood (“Bald erhellt sich unter Sturm eine Gewitterwolke aus dem Tann.”) Nine measures later, he indicates that Brünnhilde watches the brightly lit stormcloud disappear in the distance (“Während sie der davonziehenden, hell erleuchteten Gewitterwolke, die sich bald ganzlieh in der Ferne verliert, nachblickt”) as she begins to sing “Blitz und Gewölk…” This corresponds to the second timpani trill, this time on C#, which starts forte at m. 1531 and decrescendos to pianissimo, finally ending at m. 1546.

67 Act I, Scene 3, mm. 1580–1601. Wagner indicates here that there is an on-stage horn in the distance (“auf dem Theater aus dem Hintergrunde.”)  
68 Act II, Scene 1, mm. 34–38.  
69 Act II, Scene 1, mm. 169–73. As Hagen is delivering this line, Wagner’s directions for Alberich here are that his form should gradually start to disappear from
Appendix D, cont’d.

---

**Page 43 (verso), cont’d.**

| Morgenroth: Hagen: Tagesgrauen (der Ring soll ich haben) | Sunrise: Hagen: Dawning (The ring I shall gain)  

---

sight ("Wie mit dem Folgenden Alberichs Gestalt immer mehr dem Blicke entschwindet, wird auch seine Stimme immer unvernehmbarer.") Alberich continues to disappear slowly as he sings his last line: “Sei treu, Hagen, mein Sohn! Trauter Held.e.— sei treu! Sei treu! Treu!” (mm. 174–84), and should be completely out of sight (“gänzlich verschwunden.”) by m. 183.

70 Act II, Scene 1, mm. 163–65. Wagner’s stage instructions here indicate that from this point onwards, an increasingly dark shadow starts to envelop Alberich again. At the same time, the first streaks of light begin to appear in the sky (“Von hier an bedeckt ein immer finsterer werdender Schatten wieder Alberich. Zugleich beginnt das erste Tagesgrauen.”)

71 Act II, Scene 1, m. 181, to beginning of Scene 2. Sunrise immediately begins after Alberich disappears. Wagner’s stage instructions at the end of the scene indicate that Hagen, who has remained in the same position, stares motionlessly and fixedly at the Rhine, over which the light of dawn is already beginning to spread (“Hagen der unverändert in seiner Stellung verblieben, blickt regungslos und starren Auges nach dem Rheine hin, auf welchem sich die Morgendämmerung ausbreitet.”) At the beginning of Scene Two, Wagner indicates that from this point onwards, the Rhine begins to glow with the deepening red of dawn (“Von hier an färbt sich der Rhein von immer stärker erglühendem Morgenrot.”)

72 Act II, Scene 2, mm. 263–65 (this text is sung by Siegfried). At m. 266, Wagner indicates that Gutrune comes from the hall to meet him (“Gutrune tritt ihm aus der Halle entgegen.”)
### Appendix D, cont'd.

**Page 44 (recto):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Stierhörner.**  
**Mannen.** | **Cow horns.**  
**Men.** |

Siegfried mit Gutrune heraus

Am Schluß: **Hochzeitszug Hörner.**

---

**Page 45 (verso):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Dritter Akt.**  
**Beiden Clarinettentriller.** | **Third Act**  
**Two clarinet trills.** |

[Woglinde]: **Laßt uns berathen.**  
**ab.**

Flosshilde: **Let us take counsel down.**

---

73 Act II, Scene 3, mm. 387–92. As indicated by Wagner's stage directions, Hagen has mounted a rock high at the back of the stage and here, he raises his cowhorn to his lips and begins to blow (“Hagen hat eine Feldstein in der Höhe des Hintergrundes erstiegen: dort setzt er jetzt sein Stierhorn zu Blasen an.”)

74 Act II, Scene 4, mm. 788–89 (clarinet). Seidl's note corresponds to Wagner's stage directions here that Gunther leads Brünnhilde, who never once raises her eyes, to the hall, from which Siegfried and Gutrune emerge, attended by womenfolk (“Gunther geleitet Brünnhilde, welche nie aufblickt, zur Halle, aus welcher jetzt Siegfried und Gutrune, von Frauen begleitet, heraustreten.”)

75 Act II, end of Scene 5, mm. 1680–1704. Seidl's note corresponds to Wagner's stage directions for the wedding procession here which includes horn calls sounded by Siegfried and the men. He indicates that multiple horns be on the stage.

76 Act III, Scene 1, m. 50. Seidl's note indicates that in this measure, the curtain rises after two trills in the clarinet part; this matches Wagner's stage directions in the score.

77 Act III, Scene 1, mm. 154–55. Flosshilde sings this text; Seidl has incorrectly marked that it is sung by Woglinde. The stage direction corresponds to Wagner's in the score, that after Flosshilde sings this line, all three Rhinedaughters plunge beneath the waves (“Sie tauchen alle drei schnell unter.”)
### Appendix D, cont’d.

#### Page 45 (verso), cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siegfried: He Schelm, in welchem Berge barg’st du so schnell mir das Wild. auf 78</td>
<td>Siegfried: Hey, rogue! In which hill have you hidden the game so swiftly? up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie schade dass er geizig ist. ab 79</td>
<td>What a pity that he’s stingy. down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegfried: Kommt rasch, ich schenk euch den Ring. auf. 80</td>
<td>Siegfried: Come quickly! I’ll give you the ring. up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Page 46 (recto):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ein stolzes Weib wird noch heut’ dich Argen beerben, sie beut uns bess’res Gehör. umkehren. zu ihr. ab 81</td>
<td>A proud-hearted woman will be your heir today, you wretch: she’ll give us a fairer hearing. Turn back. To her. down.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

78 Act III, Scene 1, mm. 167–71. Seidl’s note corresponds to Wagner’s stage direction that after this text is sung, the Rhinedaughters resurface and resume their dance (“Die drei Rheintöchter tauchen wieder auf und schwimmen im Reigen.”)

79 Act III, Scene 1, mm. 250–52. After this text, the Rhinedaughters laugh and dive beneath the waves (“Sie lachen und tauchen unter.”)

80 Act III, Scene 1, mm. 275–79. After Siegfried’s line, Wagner indicates that Siegfried removes the ring from this finger and holds it up, which prompts the Rhinedaughters to return to the surface. (“Er hat den Ring vom Finger gezogen und hält ihn in die Höhe. Die Rheintöchter tauchen wieder auf.”)

81 Act III, Scene 1, mm. 436–46. Wagner’s stage instructions after “zu ihr” are: “Sie wenden sich schnell zum Reigen, mit welchem sie gemächlich, dem Hintergrunde zu, fortschwimmen.” (They quickly resume their dance and swim away, at a leisurely pace, towards the back of the stage.) Seidl notes that the Rhinedaughters are to turn back before they sing “zu ihr!” and are to be off-stage after they sing “zu ihr!”
Appendix D, cont’d.

### Page 47 (verso):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mannen-Zeichen, Hoiho Hoiho-Hoiho</th>
<th>Vassels’ cue Hoiho Hoiho-Hoiho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nebelschleier zu Siegfried’s Tod.</td>
<td>Fog curtain at Siegfried’s Death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schleier weg bei:</td>
<td>Mist gone at:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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82 Act III, beginning of Scene 2, mm. 511–19; sung off stage.

83 Act III, Scene 2, mm. 948–51. Wagner’s stage instructions indicate here that mists have risen from the Rhine and gradually fill the whole of the stage, on which the funeral procession has already become invisible, and remains completely hidden throughout the musical interlude. ("Aus dem Rheine sind Nebel aufgestiegen und erfüllen allmählich die ganze Bühne, auf welcher der Trauerzug bereits unsichtbar geworden ist, bis nach vornen, so daß diese, während des Zwischenspieles, gänzlich verhüllt bleibt.")

84 Wagner indicates that the mists start to divide at mm. 977–80: "Von hier an verteilen die Nebel sich wieder, bis endlich die Halle der Gibichungen, wie im ersten Aufzuge, immer erkennbarer hervortritt." (From this point onwards the mists begin to divide again, until finally the Hall of the Gibichungs can be made out once more, as in the opening act.) Seidl indicates here that the mist should be gone at the rhythm he has notated, but this does not clearly correspond to any part in the score. He perhaps inexactly recorded the general contour of longer motives at the very beginning of Act III, Scene 3, just before Gutrune’s entrance (for example, the bass-trumpet part in mm. 985 and 986).

85 Act III, Scene 3, m. 989. Seidl’s note corresponds to Wagner’s stage directions here that Gutrune enters the hall from her chamber. ("Gutrune tritt aus ihrem Gemache in die Halle heraus.")
Appendix D, cont’d.

### Page 48 (recto):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hagen-Zeichen Zum: Hoiho</th>
<th>Hagen’s cue : Hoiho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mannen nach mit der Bahre.</td>
<td>Men after with the stretcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brünnhilde: Vollbringt Brünnhilde’s Wort.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannen langsam und gemessen zurück zum Scheiterhaufen aufbauen. Später die Trauer,</td>
<td>Men slowly and measuredly build the funeral pyre in the back. Later, the mourning;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Page 49 (verso):

| Die letzteren kehren bei: *Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott.* zurück | The latter turn back at: Rest now, rest now, you God.* behind |

---

**86** Act III, Scene 3, mm. 1033–34/1041–42.

**87** When Gutrune delivers her line, “Was geschah?” (Act III, Scene 3, m. 1048), Seidl’s note indicates that the women are the first to appear on stage, followed by the men carrying the stretcher bearing Siegfried’s body. In the score, Wagner indicates that the men and women are to appear on stage beginning at m. 1052: “Männer und Frauen, mit Lichtern und Feuerbränden, geleiten in großer Verwirrung den Zug der mit Siegfrieds Leiche Heimkehrenden.” (The procession of vassals returning with Siegfried’s body is accompanied by a great confusion of men and women carrying torches and firebrands.)

**88** Act III, Scene 3, mm. 1258–63. After Brünnhilde’s line above, the men start building the funeral pyre. Seidl’s note corresponds to Wagner’s stage directions that “Die jungen Männer errichten, während des Folgenden, vor der Halle, nahe am Rheinufer, einen mächtigen Scheithaufen: Frauen schmücken diesen dann mit Decken, auf welche sie Kräuter und Blumen streuen.” (During the following, the young men raise a huge funeral pyre outside the hall, near to the bank of the Rhine: women cover it with rugs over which they strew herbs and flowers.)

**89** Act III, Scene 3, mm. 1359–68. Following Brünnhilde’s line, “Ruhe, ruhe…” Wagner’s stage directions indicate that she signals the vassals to bear Siegfried’s body to the funeral pyre; meanwhile, she draws the ring from his finger and gazes at it thoughtfully. (“Sie winkt den Mannen, Siegfrieds Leiche auf den Scheithaufen zu tragen; zugleich zieht sie von Siegfreids Finger den Ring ab und betrachtet ihn sinnend.”)
Appendix D, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 49 (verso), cont’d.</th>
<th>Page 49 (verso), cont’d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brünnhilde wirft die</td>
<td>Brünnhilde hurls the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fackel in den Scheiterhauf</td>
<td>torch into the funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roß heraus. 90</td>
<td>pyre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeichen zum Dampf</td>
<td>Cue for steam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rheintöchter, dann</td>
<td>Rheindaughters, then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hinten: Wolken, roth,</td>
<td>in the back: Cloud, red,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auf, Walhall,</td>
<td>on, Valhall,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dampf. 91</td>
<td>Steam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 50 (recto):</th>
<th>Page 50 (recto):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aus ist’s.</td>
<td>It’s over.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 51 (verso):</th>
<th>Page 51 (verso):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schönes Cello um 40 [?]</td>
<td>Beautiful cello for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>im</td>
<td>sale for the price of 40 [?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nibelungenorchester. 92</td>
<td>in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nibelungen orchestra.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Page 52 (recto): [Blank]**

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90 Act III, Scene 3, mm. 1448–56. Seidl’s note corresponds to Wagner’s stage directions here that Brünnhilde hurls the firebrand on to the pile of wood, which quickly ignites. Two ravens have flown up from the rock on the riverbank and disappear into the background. She catches sight of her horse, which two men have just led in. (“Sie schleudert den Brand in den Holzstoß, welcher sich schnell hell entzündet. Zwei Raben sind vom Felsen Ufer aufgeflogen und verschwinden nach dem Hintergrunde. Sie gewahrt ihr Roß welches soeben zwei Männer hereinführen.”)

91 Act III, Scene 3, mm. 1532–end. Wagner’s staging instructions here first indicate that a red glow breaks out with increasing brightness from the cloudbank that had settled on the horizon. (“Durch die Wolkenschicht, welche sich am Horizonte gelagert, bricht ein rötlicher Gluthschein mit wachsender Helligkeit aus.”) Valhalla appears in mm. 1555–60. For the end of the scene, Wagner’s directions indicate that as the fire finally reaches its greatest intensity, the hall of Valhalla comes into view, with the gods and heroes assembled as in Waltraute’s description in Act I. Bright flames seem to flare up in the hall of the gods, finally hiding them from sight completely. The curtain falls. (“Aus den Trümmern der zusammengestürzten Halle sehen die Männer und Frauen, in höchster Ergriffenheit den wachsenden Feuerschein am Himmel zu. Als dieser endlich in lichtester Helligkeit leuchtet, erblickt man darin den Saal Valhallas in welchem die Götter und Helden, ganz nach der Schilderung Waltrautes im ersten Aufzuge, versammelt sitzen.”)

92 This note about a cello for sale is unrelated to the rest of the book.
APPENDIX E. Transcription and Translation of Cuts to *Siegfried*, as recorded and annotated by Anton Seidl.

Seidl’s Opening Address:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of original German</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gut Heil! Dem Sänger zum Werk!</td>
<td>Good well-being! To the singer of this work!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die vorliegende Dichtung weicht öfters in wortlichen Ausdrücken, von derjenigen der Partitur ab, die massgebende Autorität in solchen Fällen ist der Ausdruck der Partitur.</td>
<td>The present poem frequently deviates from the literal version of the [original] score; the ultimate authority rests in the original copy of the score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die hier angegeben Striche sind nicht als massgebend zu betrachten. Dieselben stammen t[h]eils von dem Strichheerd in Wien her, t[h]eils waren sie auf der Journee des Richard Wagner-theaters als umgänglich not[h]wendig erachtet worden, da die Sänger damals dieses Werk des Meisters in über hundert, tagtäglich hintereinander gegebenen Aufführungen zu singen hatten, und diesen Austre[n?] gingen sonst nicht die nöt[h]ige Ausdauer entgegen gehalten werden konnten[?]. Seidl.</td>
<td>The denoted cuts here are not to be considered as authoritative. These same cuts in part originated from those used in Vienna, in part those that were considered essential for the tour of the Richard Wagner-Theater, [since] the singers back then had to sing this work of the master in over one-hundred performances, given consecutively, day-to-day, and they would not otherwise have the necessary endurance. Seidl.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***

Seidl’s Annotation¹:

**Cuts for Act I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of original German</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diese Striche sind zwar vom Meister selbst auch nicht als massgebend anerkannt worden, aber für gewöhnliche Aufführungen, vor einem nicht nach Bayreuth pilgrimden Publickum gutgehiessen und öfters empfohlen worden.</td>
<td>These cuts have not been recognized as authoritative by the master himself, except for ordinary performances, which are often recommended for an audience different from those who undertake the pilgrimage to Bayreuth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Written on the first page of the libretto text for Act I.
Appendix E, cont’d.

Act I, Scene 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 8–9)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Siegfried:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soll mich der Prahler länger noch prellen?</td>
<td>How much more must the braggart dupe me?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schwatz mir von Riesen und rüstigen Kämpfen, von kühnen Thaten und tüchtiger Wehr; will Waffen mir schmiden, Schwerte schaffen; Rühmt seine Kunst, als könnt' er 'was rechts: nehm' ich zur Hand nun was er gehämmert, mit einem Griff zergreif' ich den Quark!</td>
<td>He prates about giants and well-fought battles, of doughty deeds and well-made arms; he'd make me weapons and fashions swords; he vaunts his art as though he could aught aright: when I take in my hand whatever he's hammered, I can crush the trash in a single grip!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mm. 355–84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (p. 18)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Siegfried:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eile dich, Mime, mühe dich rasch; kannst du 'was recht's, nun zeig' deine Kunst! Täusche mich nicht mit schlechtem Tand: den Trümmern allein trau' ich 'was zu. Find' ich dich faul, fügst du sie schlecht, flick' st du mit Flausen den festen Stahl, --</td>
<td>Come on now, Mime, bestir yourself and be quick about it; if there's aught you're good at, then show me your art! Don't try to trick me with worthless trinkets: in those shards alone do I place any trust. If I find you idle or you fit them badly, if you spoil the firm steel with flimsy excuses,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mm. 1146–92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 English translation of libretto is from Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion, ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993).

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Appendix E, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (p. 18)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>dir Feigem fahr’ ich zu Leib’, das Fegen lern’st du von mir!</td>
<td>I’ll have your craven hide; You’ll learn from me then what a tanning means! For I swear that I’ll have the sword today; the weapon I’ll win for myself today.</td>
<td>Mm. 1340–56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denn heute noch, schwör’ ich, will ich das Schwert; die Waffe gewinn’ ich noch heut.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Act I, Scene 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 20–21)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wanderer: Viel erforscht’ ich, erkannte viel: wicht’ges konnt’ ich manchem künden, manchem wehren, was ihn mühte, nagende Herzens Noth.</td>
<td>Much I’ve fathomed, much made out: matters of moment I’ve made known to many and many I’ve saved from whatever irked them, cares that gnawed at their hearts.</td>
<td>Mm. 1340–56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mime: Spürtest du klug und erspähtest du viel, hier brauch’ ich nicht Spürer noch Spaher.</td>
<td>Though you’ve skillfully scouted and spied much, I need no scouts or spies around here.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (p. 21)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wanderer: Mancher wählte weise zu sein, nur was ihm noth that, wußte er nicht; was ihm frommte, ließ ich erfragen: lohnend lehr’ ihm mein Wort.</td>
<td>Many’s the man who thought himself wise but what he needed he did not know; I let him ask me what might avail him: my words he found worthwhile.</td>
<td>Mm. 1360–81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

545
Appendix E, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (p. 21)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>Mime: Müßgest Wissen waren manche: ich weiß mir g’rade genug; mir genügt mein Witz, ich will nicht mehr: dir Weisen weis’ ich den Weg!</td>
<td>Many men garner idle knowledge: I know just as much as I need; my wits suffice, I want no more: I’ll show you on your way, you sage!</td>
<td>Mm. 1360–81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Act I, Scene 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 30–31)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Siegfried: Sind mir das Flausen? Willst du mir fliehn’?</td>
<td>Are these evasions? You want to escape me?</td>
<td>Mm. 2037–76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mime: Wohl flöß’ ich dem, der’s Fürchten kennt: - doch das ließ ich dem Kinde zu lehren! Ich Dummer vergaß was einzig gut: Liebe zu mir soll’ er lernen; -- das gelang nun leider faul! Wie bring’ ich das Fürchten ihm bei?</td>
<td>Well might I flee from the man who knows fear:-- but that have I failed to teach the child! Like a fool, I forgot what’s uniquely good: he was meant to learn to love me; -- alas, that went amiss! How shall teach him what fear is?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried: He! Muß ich helfen? Was fegtest du heut’?</td>
<td>Hey! Must I help you? What have you furbished today?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mime: Um dich nur besorgt, versank ich in Sinnen, wie ich dich wichtiges wiese.</td>
<td>Concerned but for you, I was sunk in thought of how to teach you something weighty.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried: Bis unter den Sitz war’st du versunken: was wichtiges fandest du da?</td>
<td>Right under the seat I see you had sunk: what matters of weight did you find there?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 30-31)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Mime: Das Fürchten lernt’ ich für dich, Daß ich’s dich Dummen lehre.</td>
<td>For you, I have learned the meaning of fear, so I might teach it to you, you fool.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***

Act II, Scene 1:

Cuts to Act II

Seidl’s Annotation (left side of p. 44, next to Cut 6):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of original German</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bei gutem Alberich ist dieser Stück nicht notig!</td>
<td>With a good Alberich, this cut is not necessary!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 44–45)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wanderer: Zu schauen kam ich, nicht zu schaffen: wer sehre mir Wand’ers Fahrt?</td>
<td>I came to watch and not to act: who’d bar the Wanderer’s way?</td>
<td>Mm. 191–258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alberich: Du Rath wüthender Ränke! Wär’ ich dir zu lieb doch no dummm wie damals, als du mich Blöden bandest! Wie leicht gerieth es den Ring mir nochmals zu rauben! Hab’ Act: deine Kunst kenne ich wohl; doch wo du schwach bist, bleib mir auch nicht verschwien. Mit meinen Schätzen Zahltest du Schulden;</td>
<td>You mine of malicious tricks! Were I, as you wish, still as stupid as then, when you bound the foolish dwarf, how easy, indeed, it would prove to deprive me once more of the ring! Beware: I know your ways well enough; but where you are weak has not escaped me either. With my treasures you paid your debts;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 44–45)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>mein Ring lohnte der Riesen Müh’, die deine Burg dir gebaut; was mit den trotzigen einst du vertragen, dess’ Runen shart noch heut’ deines Speeres herrischer Schaft.</td>
<td>my ring rewarded the toil of those giants who built your stronghold for you; what you once agreed with those insolent creatures is still preserved today in runes on your spear’s all-powerful shaft.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanderer:</td>
<td>Durch Vertrages Treue-Runen band er dich Bösen mir nicht: dich beugt er mir durch seine Kraft; zum Krieg d’rum wahr’ ich ihn wohl.</td>
<td>By the faithful runes of contract it bound you not to me, you knave: it bends you to my will by virtue of its might; and so I ward it well in case of war.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberich:</td>
<td>Wie stolz du dräu’st In trotziger Stärke, Und wie dir’s im Busen doch bangt!</td>
<td>How proudly you threaten with insolent strength, yet how fearful you are at heart!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (p. 45)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Deinen Sinn kenn’ ich wohl; doch sorgt er mich nicht: des Ringes waltet wer ihn gewinnt.</td>
<td>I know your mind full well; it gives me no cause for worry: he shall command the ring who wins it.</td>
<td>Mm. 293–319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (p. 45)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Alberich: Wie dunkel sprichst du, Was ich deutlich doch weiß! An Heldensöhne halt sich dein Trotz, die traut deinem Blute entblüht. Pflegtest du wohl eines Knaben, der klug die Frucht dir pflücke, die du – nicht brechen darf’st?</td>
<td>How darkly you speak of what I know clearly! Defiant, you cling to heroes’ sons who are dearly descended from your own blood. Haven’t you nurtured a boy who would cleverly pluck the fruit which you yourself aren’t allowed to pick?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Act II, Scene 3:

#### Seidl’s Annotation (left side of p. 68, next to Cut 8):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of original German</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dieses Stück ist nur bei besonders schwierigen Anlernen zu empfehlen!</td>
<td>This piece of music is to be recommended only with exceptionally difficult training!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 68–69)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mime: Denn haßte ich dich auch nicht so sehr, und hätt’ ich des Schimpf’s und der schändlichen Mühe auch nicht so viel zu rächen: aus dem Wege dich zu räumen darf ich doch nicht rasten, wie käm’ ich sonst anders zur Beute, da Alberich auch nach ihr lugt?—</td>
<td>For even if I hated you less and hadn’t so much of your hateful abuse and such shameful toil to avenge, I’d still waste no time in clearing you out of the way for how else could I gain the spoils, since Alberich covets them too? —</td>
<td>Mm. 1607–21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (p. 69)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Siegfried: In der Höhle hier lieg’ auf dem Hort! Mit zäher List erzieltest du ihn: jetzt magst du des wonnigen walten! Einen guten Wächter geb’ ich dir auch, daß er vor Dieben dich deckt.</td>
<td>In the cave here lie on the hoard! With obstinate cunning you tried to win it: the wondrous hoard is now yours to command! A goodly watchman I’ll give to you, too, to shelter you from thieves.</td>
<td>Mm. 1660–72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Act III, Scene 1:

#### Cuts for Act III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 74–75)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Erda: Mein Schlaf ist Träumen, mein Träumen Sinnen, mein Sinnen Walten des Wissens. Doch wenn ich schlafe, wachen Nomen: sie weben das Seil, und spinnen fromm was ich weiß:-- was frägst du nicht die Nomen?</td>
<td>My sleep is dreaming, my dreaming is brooding, my brooding the exercise of knowledge. But when I sleep, then Norns keep watch: they weave the rope and bravely spin whatever I know: -- why don’t you ask the Norns?</td>
<td>Mm. 190–216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanderer: Im Zwange der Welt weben die Nornen: sie können nichts wenden noch wandeln; doch deiner Weisheit dankt’ ich den Rath wohl, wie zu hemmen ein rollends Rad?</td>
<td>In thrall to the world those wise women weave: naught can they make or mend; but I’d thank the store of your wisdom to be told how to hold back a rolling wheel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Appendix E, cont’d.

**Act III, Scene 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Wanderer:</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 80–82)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Wanderer:</td>
<td>Wer schuf das Schwert so scharf und hart, daß der stärkste Feind ihm fiel?</td>
<td>Who made the sword so sharp and hard that his fiercest enemy fell before him?</td>
<td>Mm. 533–621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried:</td>
<td>Das schweißt' ich mir selbst, da's der Schmied nicht konnte: schwertlos noch wär' ich wohl sonst.</td>
<td>I forged it myself since the smith was unable: I’d otherwise still be swordless.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanderer:</td>
<td>Doch wer schuf die starken Stücken, daraus das schwert du dir geschweißt?</td>
<td>But who made the mighty fragments from which you forged the sword?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried:</td>
<td>Was weiß ich davon! Ich weiß allein, daß die Stücken mir nichts nützen, schuf ich das Schwert mir nicht neu.</td>
<td>What do I know of that? I know only unless I re-made the sword.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanderer:</td>
<td>Das – mein' ich wohl auch!</td>
<td>That I can well believe!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried:</td>
<td>Was lach’st du mich aus? Alter Frager, hör’ einmal auf: lass’ mich nicht länger hier schwatzen! Kannst du den Weg mir weisen, so rede: vermags't du's nicht, so halte dein Maul!</td>
<td>Are you laughing at me? No more of your questions, old man; don’t keep me here talking any longer! If you can show me the way, then tell me: if you’re unable, then hold your tongue!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanderer:</td>
<td>Geduld, du Knabe! Dünk’ ich dich alt, so sollst du Achtung mir bieten.</td>
<td>Patience, my lad! If you think that I’m old, you should show me respect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 80–82)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>Siegfried: Das wär’ nicht übel! So lang’ ich lebe stand mir ein Alter stets im Wege: den hab’ ich nun fort gefegt. Stemm’st du oft länger steif dich mir entgegen – sieh’ dich vor, sag’ ich, daß du wie Mime nicht fähr’st! Wie sieh’st du denn aus? Was hast du gar für ‘nen großen Hut? Warum hängt er dir so in’s Gesicht?</td>
<td>A fine idea! As long as I’ve lived an old man has always stood in my way: now I have swept him aside. If you offer me more of your stiff opposition, take care, I say, that you don’t share Mime’s fate! Let me see what you look like! Why are you wearing so huge a hat? Why does it hang down over your face?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanderer: Das ist so Wand’rers Weise, wenn dem Wind entgegen er geht.</td>
<td>That is the Wanderer’s way when he walks against the wind.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegfried: Doch darunter fehlt dir ein Auge Das schlug dir einer gewiß schon aus, dem du zu trotzig den Weg vertrat’st? Mach’ dich jetzt fort! Sonst könntest du leicht das and’re auch noch verlieren.</td>
<td>But under it one of your eyes is missing! No doubt someone struck it out when you stubbornly stood in his way? Be off with you now! Or else you could easily lose the other one, too.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanderer: Ich seh’, mein Sohn, wo du nichts weißt, da weißt du dir leicht zu helfen. Mit dem Auge, das als and‘res mir fehlt, erblick’st du selber das eine, das mir zum Sehen verbleib.</td>
<td>I see, my son, that where you know nothing, you know how to get your own way. With the eye which, as my second self, is missing, you yourself can glimpse the one that’s left for me to see with.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegfried: Zum Lachen bist du mir lustig! …</td>
<td>At least you’re good for a laugh! –</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Act III, Scene 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 86–87)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Siegfried: Mir schwebt und schwankt und schwirrt es umher; sehrendes Sehnen zehrt meine Sinne: am zagenen Herzen zittert die Hand!</td>
<td>Around me everything floats and sways and swims; searing desire consumes my senses: on my quaking heart my hand is trembling!</td>
<td>Mm. 968–77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seidl’s Annotation (right side of p. 91, next to Cut 13):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of original German</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dieses St[ü]ck ist sehr zu verwerfen; es ist jedoch leider bei fast allen Brünnhilden eingebürgert. Als Vorwand wird immer das anstrengende Singen des kommenden längeren S[ä]tzes der Brünnh. angegeben.</td>
<td>This part is much discarded; it has still, unfortunately, to be adopted by nearly all who sing the role of Brünnhilde. The pretext given always is the strenuous singing of the upcoming longer phrases of Brünnhilde.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 91–92)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Brünnhilde: --Dort seh ich Grane, mein selig Roß: wie weidet er munter, der mit mir schlief! Mit mir hat ihn Siegfried erweckt.</td>
<td>-- There I see Grane, my blessed horse: awake, he grazes who slept beside me! Siegfried awoke him with me.</td>
<td>Mm. 1284–1355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried: Auf wonnigem Munde weidet mein Auge: in brünstigem Durst doch brennen die Lippen, daß der Augen Weide sie labe!</td>
<td>My eyes now feast on your lovely mouth: yet with keen-edged thirst my lips are burning, longing to be regaled by this feast of my eyes!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Text from Libretto (pp. 91–92)</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
<td>Measures in Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>Brünnhilde: Dort she’ ich den Schild, der Helden schirmt; dort she’ ich den Helm, der das Haupt mir barg: er schirmt, er birgt mich nicht mehr!</td>
<td>There I see the shield that sheltered heroes; there I see the helmet that hid my head: it shields and hides me no more!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried: Eine selige Maid versehrte mein Herz; Wunden dem Haupte schlug mir ein Weib:— ich kam ohne Schild und Helm!</td>
<td>A blissful maid has pierced my heart; a woman has wounded my head:— I came without shield and helmet!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brünnhilde: Ich sehe der Brünne prangenden Stahl: ein scharfes Schwert schnitt sie entzwei; von dem maßlichen Leibe lös’ es die Wehr:— ich bin ohne Schutz und Schirm, ohne Trutz ein trauriges Weib!</td>
<td>I see the brinie’s splendent steel: a keen-edged sword has cut it in two; it loosed my maidenly body’s defences:— I’m stripped of shelter and shield a weaponless, sorrowing woman!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried: Durch brennendes Feuer fuhr ich zu dir; nicht Brünne noch Panzer barg meinen Leib: nun brach die Lohre in die Brust; es braus’t mein Blut in blühender Brunst; ein zehrendes Feuer ist mir entzündet: die Gluth, die Brünhild’s Felsen umbrann die brennt mir nun in der Brust!— O Weib, jetzt löse den Brand! Schweige die schäumende Wuth!</td>
<td>Through fierce-burning fire I came to you; no brinie nor armour protected my body: now has the blaze broken into my breast; my blood is pounding with rampant desire; consuming fire is kindled within me: the flames that raged around Brünnhilde’s fell are burning now in my breast!— O woman, quench the fire now! Quell this chafing rage!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Text from Libretto (p. 95)</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
<td>Measures in Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Siegfried:</td>
<td>No longer do I have myself; wouldn that I might have you!— A glorious floodtide billows before me; with all my senses I see only it—the wondrously billowing wave: though it shatter my likeness, I'm burning myself now to cool raging passion within the flood; I shall leap, as I am, straight into the stream:— o that its billows engulf me in bliss and my longing be stilled in the flood!</td>
<td>Mm. 1563–94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E, cont’d.

Seidl’s Annotation (bottom of p. 95, by Cut 15):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription of original German</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ist wegen der grossen Schwierigkeit für den Siegfried, gestrichen worden!</td>
<td>Has been cut because of the great difficulty for Siegfried!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Text from Libretto (pp. 95–96)</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Measures in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Brünnhilde: O Siegfried! Dein – war ich von je!</td>
<td>O Siegfried! Yours was I aye!</td>
<td>Mm. 1626–57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried: War’st du’s von je, so sei es jetzt!</td>
<td>If you were once, then be so now!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brünnhilde: Dein werd’ ich ewig sein!</td>
<td>Yours shall I be for ever!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried: Was du sein wirst, sei es mir heut’! Faßt dich mein Arm, umschling’ ich dich fest; schlägt meine Brust brünstig die deine; zünden die Blicke, zehren die Athem sich; Aug’ in Auge, Mund an Mund: dann bist du mir was bang du mir war’st und wirst! Dann brach sich die brennende Sorge, ob jetzt Brünnhilde mein?</td>
<td>What you will be, be today! As my arm enfolds you, I hold you fast; as my heart beats wildly against your own; as our glances ignite and breath feeds on breath, eye to eye and mouth on mouth, then, to me, you must be what, fearful, you were and will be! Then gone were the burning doubt that Brünnhilde might not now be mine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
### APPENDIX F. Singers in the American Performances of the Ring Operas, 1885–1891, and their Known German Theatre Affiliations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>City of Origin/House Affiliation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>City of Origin/House Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alvary, Max</td>
<td>Grand Ducal Opera House, Weimar</td>
<td>von Milde, Rudolph</td>
<td>Grand Ducal Opera House, Weimar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck, Joseph</td>
<td>Landes Theatre, Prague</td>
<td>Mittelhauser, Albert</td>
<td>Musical Conservatory, Sondershausen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behrens, Conrad</td>
<td>Rotterdam</td>
<td>Mödlinger, Ludwig</td>
<td>National Theatre, Augsburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better, Leonore</td>
<td>Imperial Conservatory of Music, Vienna</td>
<td>Morin-Olden, Fanny</td>
<td>Stadt Theatre, Leipzig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandt, Marianne</td>
<td>Berlin Imperial Opera House</td>
<td>Morse, Carrie</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmblad, Johannes</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Niemann, Albert</td>
<td>Berlin Imperial Opera House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fischer, Emil</td>
<td>Königliche Sächsische Oper, Dresden</td>
<td>Perotti, Julius</td>
<td>Imperial Hungarian opera, Buda–Pesth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franconi, Sylvia</td>
<td>City Opera House, Augsburg</td>
<td>Reichmann, Theodore</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank, Betty</td>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>Reil, Hedwig</td>
<td>Stadt Theatre, Augsburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsticker, Carrie</td>
<td>Grand Opera, Cologne</td>
<td>Robinson, Adolf</td>
<td>Grand Opera, Hamburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grienauer, Alois</td>
<td>Stadt Theatre, Hamburg</td>
<td>Robinson, Anna</td>
<td>Grand Opera, Hamburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gudehus, Heinrich</td>
<td>Dresden</td>
<td>Schott, Anton</td>
<td>Royal Opera House, Hanover</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gutjär, Anna</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Sedlmeyer, Wilhelm</td>
<td>Stadt Theatre, Hamburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>von Januschowsky,</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Seidl-Kraus, Auguste</td>
<td>Grand Opera, Bremen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalisch, Paul</td>
<td>Berlin Imperial Opera House</td>
<td>Senger-Bettaque, Katherine</td>
<td>Berlin, Bremen</td>
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<td>Kaschowska, Félicie</td>
<td>Hof Theatre, Warsaw</td>
<td>Siegllitz, Georg</td>
<td>City Opera House, Nuremberg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kembrit, Otto</td>
<td>Royal Opera House, Hanover</td>
<td>Schach, Anna</td>
<td>Grand Opera, Prague</td>
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<tr>
<td>Klein, Ida</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Sonntag-Uhl, Emmy</td>
<td>Breslau</td>
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<td>Kögel, Josef</td>
<td>Grand Opera, Hamburg</td>
<td>Staudigl, Josef</td>
<td>Grand Ducal Opera, Karlsruhe</td>
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<td>Krämer-Wiedl, Marie</td>
<td>Mannheim</td>
<td>Stern, Anna</td>
<td>Hamburg</td>
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<td>Lehmann, Lilli</td>
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<td>Stritt, Albert</td>
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<td>Lehmler, Philip</td>
<td>Grand Opera House, Riga</td>
<td>Traubmann, Sophie</td>
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<td>Luria, Juan</td>
<td>Stuttgart</td>
<td>Vogl, Heinrich</td>
<td>Munich Court Opera</td>
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<td>Materna, Amalie</td>
<td>Vienna Court Opera</td>
<td>Weiss, Eugene</td>
<td>Stadt Theatre, Augsburg</td>
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<td>Mayer, Wilhelmine</td>
<td>City Opera House, Freiburg</td>
<td>Wiesner, Sophie</td>
<td>Cologne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meisslinger, Louise</td>
<td>Hamburg</td>
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1 Information for this table compiled from Metropolitan Opera programme books, 1884–1890, head at the Metropolitan Opera Archives, New York.
APPENDIX G. 1889 Tour of Stanton’s German Opera Company of the Metropolitan Opera House.

G.1. Locations, Dates of Performances, and Repertoire.

**Performance Dates**

**Philadelphia, PA**

| March 25 | *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* |
| March 26 | *Das Rheingold* |
| March 27 | *Die Walküre* |
| March 28 | *Siegfried* |
| March 29 | *Götterdämmerung* |
| March 30 (matinee) | *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* |

**Boston, MA**

| April 1 | *Das Rheingold* |
| April 2 | *Die Walküre* |
| April 3 | *Siegfried* |
| April 5 | *Götterdämmerung* |
| April 6 (matinee) | *Das Rheingold* |
| April 6 | *Tannhäuser* |
| April 8 | *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* |
| April 9 | *Das Rheingold* |
| April 10 | *Die Walküre* |
| April 11 | *Siegfried* |
| April 12 | *Götterdämmerung* |
| April 13 (matinee) | *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* |

**Chicago, IL**

| April 22 | *Das Rheingold* |
| April 23 | *Die Walküre* |
| April 24 | *Siegfried* |
| April 25 | *Götterdämmerung* |
| April 26 | *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* |
| April 27 (matinee) | *Tannhäuser* |
| April 27 | *Fidelio* |
| April 29 | *Siegfried* |
| April 30 | *Götterdämmerung* |
| May 1 | *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* |
| May 2 | *Tannhäuser* |
| May 3 | *Lohengrin* |
| May 4 (matinee) | *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* |
| May 4 | *Lohengrin* |

**St. Louis, MO**

May 6 – *Das Rheingold*
May 7 – *Die Walküre*
May 8 – *Siegfried*
May 9 – *Götterdämmerung*
May 10 – *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*
May 11 – *Tannhäuser*

**Milwaukee, WI**

| April 16 | *Das Rheingold* |
| April 17 | *Die Walküre* |
| April 18 | *Siegfried* |
| April 20 | *Götterdämmerung* |

* Paris version (this version was performed at the Metropolitan Opera House until December 1953).
** The Orpheus Männerchor augmented the usual choral forces.
### G.2. Personnel for the *Ring* Operas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Das Rheingold</th>
<th>Die Walküre</th>
<th>Siegfried</th>
<th>Götterdämmerung</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alvary, Max</td>
<td>Loge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Siegfried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck, Joseph</td>
<td>Alberich</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gunther</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doré, Jean</td>
<td>Donner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fischer, Emil</td>
<td>Wotan</td>
<td>Wotan</td>
<td>The Wanderer</td>
<td>Hagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grienauer, Alois</td>
<td>Donner</td>
<td>Wotan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gunther</td>
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<td>Kalisch, Paul</td>
<td>Alberich</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Siegfried</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mittelhauser, Albert</td>
<td>Froh</td>
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<td>Fasolt</td>
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<td>Alberich</td>
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<td>Sedlmayer, Wilhelm</td>
<td>Mime</td>
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<td>Mime</td>
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<td>Weiss, Eugene</td>
<td>Fafner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hunding</td>
<td>Fafner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bauman-Trilo, Anna Marie</td>
<td>Fafner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brünnhilde</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egener, Christine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Siegrune</td>
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<td>Göttich, Lena</td>
<td>Schwertleite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hartmann, Nina</td>
<td>Grimmerde</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaschowska, Félicie</td>
<td>Wellgunde</td>
<td>Sieglinde</td>
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<td>Wellgunde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein, Ida</td>
<td>Freia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ortilinde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lehmann, Lilli</td>
<td>Sieglinde</td>
<td>Brünnhilde</td>
<td>Brünnhilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meisslinger, Louise</td>
<td>Fricka</td>
<td>Fricka</td>
<td>Gutrune</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miron, Emmy</td>
<td>Rossweise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reil, Hedwig</td>
<td>Erda</td>
<td>Waltraute</td>
<td></td>
<td>Flosshilde</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sedlmayer, Amelia</td>
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<td>Gerhilde</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traubmann, Sophie</td>
<td>Woglinde</td>
<td>Helmwige</td>
<td>Woodbird</td>
<td>Woglinde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H. Performances of the *Ring* Operas by the Walter Damrosch Opera Company, 1894–1899.*

*This table consists of all known performances given by the Damrosch, Damrosch-Ellis, and the Charles A. Ellis Opera Companies. It does not include performances that were scheduled but later cancelled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Date Performed</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Total Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Tue, 13 Feb 1894</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>(Carnegie) Music Hall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Sat, 17 Feb 1894</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Mon, 26 Mar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Metropolitan Opera House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Götterdämmerung</em></td>
<td>Wed, 28 Mar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Götterdämmerung</em></td>
<td>Sat, 31 Mar (mat)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Mon, 2 Apr</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Academy of Music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Götterdämmerung</em></td>
<td>Wed, 4 Apr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Wed, 11 Apr (mat)</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Boston Theatre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Götterdämmerung</em></td>
<td>Thu, 12 Apr (mat)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td><em>Siegfried</em></td>
<td>Thu, 28 Feb 1895</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Metropolitan Opera House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Siegfried</em></td>
<td>Sat, 2 Mar (mat)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Götterdämmerung</em></td>
<td>Mon, 4 Mar</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Mon, 11 Mar</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Siegfried</em></td>
<td>Wed, 13 Mar</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Götterdämmerung</em></td>
<td>Fri, 15 Mar</td>
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<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Wed, 20 Mar</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Wed, 27 Mar</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Academy of Music</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td><em>Die Walküre</em></td>
<td>Thu, 28 Mar</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Metropolitan Opera House</td>
<td>At &quot;popular prices&quot;</td>
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<td>Boston</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Thu, 4 Apr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Götterdämmerung</em></td>
<td>Fri, 5 Apr</td>
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<td>Mon, 15 Apr</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
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<tr>
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<td><em>Siegfried</em></td>
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<td>Wed, 24 Apr</td>
<td>St. Louis</td>
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### Appendix H, cont’d.

<table>
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<th>Season</th>
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<th>Date Performed</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Siegfried</td>
<td>Sat, 27 Apr (mat)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
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<td>Sat, 4 May (mat)</td>
<td>Kansas City</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895-1896</td>
<td>Die Walküre</td>
<td>Tue, 12 Nov 1895</td>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>Walnut Street Theatre</td>
<td>Die Walküre = 6</td>
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<td>1895-1896</td>
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<td>Wed, 20 Nov</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Fri, 22 Nov</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Götterdämmerung</td>
<td>Wed, 27 Nov</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-1896</td>
<td>Siegfried</td>
<td>Sat, 30 Nov (mat)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Die Walküre</td>
<td>Tue, 3 Dec</td>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>Music Hall</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Siegfried</td>
<td>Wed, 4 Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-1896</td>
<td>Götterdämmerung</td>
<td>Thu, 5 Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Die Walküre</td>
<td>Tue, 17 Dec</td>
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<td>Die Walküre</td>
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<td>Die Walküre</td>
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<td>Die Walküre</td>
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Das Rheingold

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<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fricka (mezzo-soprano)</td>
<td>Marie Brandis</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erda (contralto)</td>
<td>Riza Eibenschütz</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freia (soprano)</td>
<td>Alma Powell</td>
<td>1896–97 (Philadelphia only)</td>
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<td>Marie Hartmann</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woglinde (soprano)</td>
<td>Augusta Vollmar</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellgunde (soprano)</td>
<td>Marie Mattfeld</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flosshilde (mezzo-soprano)</td>
<td>Riza Eibenschütz</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wotan (bass-baritone)</td>
<td>Emil Fischer</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alberich (bass-baritone)</td>
<td>Wilhelm Mertens</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mime (tenor)</td>
<td>Paul Lange</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<td>Loge (tenor)</td>
<td>Fritz Ernst</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
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<td>Fasolt (bass-baritone)</td>
<td>Heinrich Hobbing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fafner (bass)</td>
<td>Fritz Derschuch</td>
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<td>Froh (tenor)</td>
<td>Wilhelm Xanten</td>
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<td>Donner (bass-baritone)</td>
<td>Gerhard Stehmann</td>
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Conductor: Walter Damrosch 1896–97
Stage Manager: Unknown 1896–97
Properties: Unknown 1896–97

Die Walküre

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<th>Role</th>
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<th>Seasons Performed</th>
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| Brünnhilde (soprano) | Amalie Materna              | 1894
|                   | Marie Brema                   | 1894; 1898–99 (Boston and Chicago only)                 |
|                   | Katherina Klafskey           | 1895–96 (Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans only)          |
|                   | Milka Ternina                | 1895–96 (Boston, Philadelphia only)                     |
|                   | Lilli Lehmann                 | 1896–97                                                 |
|                   | Frau Mohar-Ravenstein        | 1896–97 (Philadelphia – 16 Dec)                         |
|                   | Johanna Gadski               | 1897–98 (Philadelphia only); 1898–99 (Philadelphia only) |
|                   | Lillian Nordica              | 1897–98                                                 |
| Sieglinde (soprano) | Selma Kört–Kronold            | 1894
|                   | Elsa Kutscherra               | 1895 (New York only)                                    |
|                   | Rosa Sucher                   | 1895 (New York – 20 Mar; St. Louis)                     |
|                   | Johanna Gadski               | 1895 (Boston, Chicago); 1896–97 (Philadelphia and New York only); 1897–98; 1898–99 (Boston only) |
|                   | Louise Mulder                 | 1895–96                                                 |
|                   | Susan Strong                  | 1896–97 (Boston and St. Louis only)                      |
|                   | Marie Barna                   | 1897–98 (Philadelphia only)                             |
|                   | Marie Brandis                 | 1898–99 (Philadelphia only)                             |
## Appendix I, cont’d.
*(Die Walküre, cont’d.)*

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<td>Gisella Staudigl</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
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<td>Lena Hartmann</td>
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<td>Marcella Lindh</td>
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<td>Marie Van Cauteren</td>
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(*Die Walküre*, cont’d.)

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### Siegfried

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Singer</th>
<th>Seasons Performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brünnhilde (soprano)</td>
<td>Rosa Sucher</td>
<td>1895 (New York, Boston, St. Louis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elsa Kutscherra</td>
<td>1895 (Chicago only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Katherine Klafsky</td>
<td>1895–96 (Chicago only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gisela Stoll</td>
<td>1895–96 (St. Louis only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise Mulder</td>
<td>1895–96 (New Orleans and Milwaukee only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Milka Ternina</td>
<td>1895–96 (Boston and New York only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susan Strong</td>
<td>1896–97 (Philadelphia and Washington DC only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lilli Lehmann</td>
<td>1896–97 (Boston and St. Louis only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marie Barna</td>
<td>1897–98 (Philadelphia only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lillian Nordica</td>
<td>1896–97 (New York only); 1897–98 (New York and Boston only); 1898–99 (Chicago only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johanna Gadski</td>
<td>1897–98 (Chicago only); 1898–99 (Boston and Chicago only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erda (contralto)</td>
<td>Marie Maurer</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Riza Eibenschütz</td>
<td>1895–96; 1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gisella Staudigl</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Not performed</em></td>
<td>1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Bird (soprano)</td>
<td>Marcella Lindh</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mina Schilling</td>
<td>1895–96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Augusta Vollmar</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florence Toronto</td>
<td>1897–98; 1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegfried (tenor)</td>
<td>Max Alvary</td>
<td>1895; 1895–96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ernst Kraus</td>
<td>1896–97; 1897–98; 1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wanderer (bass)</td>
<td>Franz Schwarz</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gerhard Stehmann</td>
<td>1895 (St. Louis only); 1895–96; 1896–97; 1897–98; 1898–99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mime (tenor)</td>
<td>Paul Lange</td>
<td>1895; 1895–96; 1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hans Breuer</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Herr Kissling</td>
<td>1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberich (bass)</td>
<td>Rudolph Oberhauser</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilhelm Mertens</td>
<td>1895–96; 1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Bispham</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max Stury</td>
<td>1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fafner (bass)</td>
<td>Conrad Behrens</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emil Senger</td>
<td>1895 (Chicago and St. Louis only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julius Von Putlitz</td>
<td>1895–96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fritz Derschuch</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Herr Rains</td>
<td>1897–98; 1898–99</td>
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## Appendix I, cont’d.
*(Siegfried, cont’d.)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<th>Seasons Performed</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conductor</strong></td>
<td>Walter Damrosch</td>
<td>1895; 1895–96; 1896–97; 1897–98; 1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Otto Lohse</td>
<td>1895–96 (Boston, New York only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage Manager</strong></td>
<td>Gustav Harder</td>
<td>1895; 1895–96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1896–97; 1897–98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>George Egener</td>
<td>1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties</strong></td>
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<td>1895; 1896–97; 1897–98; 1898–99</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joseph Engelhardt</td>
<td>1895–96</td>
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### Götterdämmerung

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
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<th>Seasons Performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brünnhilde (soprano)</td>
<td>Amalie Materna</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosa Sucher</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Katherine Klafsky</td>
<td>1895–96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lilli Lehmann</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lillian Nordica</td>
<td>1897–98; 1898–99 (Philadelphia only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marie Brema</td>
<td>1898–99 (Boston only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutrune (soprano)</td>
<td>Selma Kört–Kronold</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johanna Gadski</td>
<td>1895; 1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Riza Eibenschütz</td>
<td>1895–96; 1896–97 (Boston only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marie Brandis</td>
<td>1896–97; 1896–97 (New York only); 1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marie Barma</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltraute (mezzo-soprano)</td>
<td>Not Performed</td>
<td>1894–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Norn (contralto)</td>
<td>Not Performed</td>
<td>1894–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Norn (mezzo–soprano)</td>
<td>Not Performed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Norn (soprano)</td>
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<td>1894–99</td>
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<td>Woglinde (soprano)</td>
<td>Marcella Lindh</td>
<td>1894; 1895</td>
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<td>Mina Schilling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Augusta Vollmar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Florence Toronto</td>
<td>1897–98; 1898–99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weiglunde (soprano)</td>
<td>Selma Kört-Kronold</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mina Schilling</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marie Mattfeld</td>
<td>1895–96; 1896–97; 1897–98; 1898–99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flosshilde (mezzo-soprano)</td>
<td>Marie Maurer</td>
<td>1894; 1895; 1895–96</td>
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<td>Riza Eibenschütz</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gisella Staudigl</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rose Olitzka</td>
<td>1898–99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siegfried (tenor)</td>
<td>Anton Schott</td>
<td>1894 (New York only); 1895–96 (Boston and New York only)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Max Alvery</td>
<td>1895 (Boston and St. Louis only)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicolaus Rothmühl</td>
<td>1895–96 (Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans only)</td>
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<td>Wilhelm Grüning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paul Kalisch</td>
<td>1897–98; 1898–99</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ernst Kraus</td>
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Appendix I, cont’d.
(Götterdämmerung, cont’d.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Singer</th>
<th>Seasons Performed</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gunther (bass–baritone)</td>
<td>Emil Steger</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Rudolph Oberhauser</td>
<td>1895</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilhelm Mertens</td>
<td>1895–96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demeter Popovici</td>
<td>1895–96 (New York only except 25 Mar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carl Somer</td>
<td>1896–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Josef Staudigl</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max Stury</td>
<td>1898–99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hagen (bass)</td>
<td>Emil Fischer</td>
<td>1894; 1895; 1895–96; 1896–97 (New York only); 1897–98</td>
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<td>Herr Rains</td>
<td>1898–99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alberich (bass–baritone)</td>
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<td>Walter Damrosch</td>
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<td>Otto Lohse</td>
<td>1895–96 (New Orleans and Boston only)</td>
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<td>Gustav Harder</td>
<td>1895; 1895–96</td>
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<td>George Egener</td>
<td>1898–99</td>
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<td>Properties</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Joseph Engelhardt</td>
<td>1895–96</td>
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APPENDIX J. Extant Mapleson Cylinder Recordings of the *Ring* at the Metropolitan Opera, 1901–1903.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Date Recorded</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Die Walküre</strong></td>
<td>Act II, Scene 1 (Brünnhilde, Wotan and Fricka)&lt;br&gt;- “Hojotoho! Hojotoho!” ... “Heihih!”&lt;br&gt;- “lieb ich auch muthiger Männer Schlacht” ... “heiaha!”&lt;br&gt;- “Soll süsse Lust deinen Segen dir lohnen” ... “So ist es den aus”</td>
<td>16 Jan 1903</td>
<td>Hertz Nordica Van Rooy, Reuss-Belce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act III, Scene 1 (The Valkyries)&lt;br&gt;- “Hojotoho!” ... “Sind die And’ren schon da?”&lt;br&gt;- “Die Stüte stößt mir der Hengst!” ... “Heiha! Heiha! [Im Wald mit den Rossen]”&lt;br&gt;- “Hojotoho!” ... “Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha”&lt;br&gt;- “O hörstes Wunder! Herrliche Maid!” ... “Wo ist Brünnhild”</td>
<td>21 Feb 1903</td>
<td>Hertz Seygard, Van Cauteren, Homer, Schumann-Heink, Bauermeister, Marilly, Bridewell, Maurer Gadski, Nordica, Bispham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act III, Scene 3 (Wotan’s Farewell and Magic Fire Music)&lt;br&gt;- “Leb’ wohl, du kühnes herrliches Kind!” ... mein Gruß dich mehr grüssen”&lt;br&gt;- “Denn Einer nur freie die Braut, der freier als ich, der Gott!”&lt;br&gt;- “durschreite das Feuer nie” ... [to end]</td>
<td>12 Feb 1903</td>
<td>Hertz Bispham “Magic Fire” music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Siegfried</strong></td>
<td>Act I, Scene 3 (Forging Songs)&lt;br&gt;- “Nothung! Nothung!” ... “Blasé Balg! Blasé die Gluth!”&lt;br&gt;- “Heiha! Ho! Ho! Heiah!”&lt;br&gt;- “Nothung! Neidliches Schwert” ... [to end of Act]&lt;br&gt;- “sein rothes Riesel röthete dich” ... “als Nibelungfürst fahr’ ich darnieder” (note cut between “Nun hat die Gluth” ... “Haheiaha!”)&lt;br&gt;- “Hoho! Hoho! Hohe! Schmeide , mein Hammer”... “Der Frohen Funken wie freu’ ich mich!”</td>
<td>19 Mar 1901</td>
<td>Damrosch Jean de Reszke Reiss Hertz Anthes, Reiss</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act III, Scene 3 (Duet of Brünnhilde and Siegfried)&lt;br&gt;- “froh und heiter’ ein Held!” ... “mit allen Sinnen she’ ich nur sie”&lt;br&gt;- “Sie des Blutes Ströme sich zünden” ... “lachend zu Grunde geh’n”&lt;br&gt;- “Leb’wohl, prangende Götterpracht” ... [to end]</td>
<td>19 Jan 1903</td>
<td>Hertz Anthes, Nordica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opera</td>
<td>Excerpt</td>
<td>Date Recorded</td>
<td>Artist(s)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Götterdämmerung</td>
<td>Act III, Scene 3 (Brünnhilde’s Immolation)</td>
<td>28 Feb 1903</td>
<td>Hertz Nordica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Starke Scheite schichtet mir dort” … “Vollbringt Brünnhildes Wort!”</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Mein Erbe nun nehm’ ich zu eigen” … “das euch zum Unheil geraubt”</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “so—werf’ ich den Brand in Walhall’s pragende Burg” … “Siegfried! Siegfried! Sieh!”</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX K. Americans at the 1896 Bayreuth Festival, based on the extant 1896 Fremdenlisten.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number in Party</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Staying with</th>
<th>Residence in Bayreuth</th>
<th>Fremdenlisten No. and Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Miss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Th. Reiss</td>
<td>Richard Wagnerstr. 79</td>
<td>17; 28 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpin, Mr. und Mrs. Charles W. Me.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Albert Preu</td>
<td>Karlstrasse 3</td>
<td>9; 22 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpin [Jr.], Dr. und Mrs. D. H. Me.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Albert Preu (Rechtsrath)</td>
<td>Karlstrasse 3</td>
<td>9; 22 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, Mr. Alex</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hôtel Sonne</td>
<td>15; 27 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Miss Margaret</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Karl Boller</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 35</td>
<td>6; 21 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barry, C.K.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Musiker</td>
<td>Oberlin (Ohio)</td>
<td>Gottfried Händel</td>
<td>Opernstrasse 1</td>
<td>5; 21 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barton, Frau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Amerika</td>
<td>Frau Max Specht</td>
<td>Alexanderstr. 4</td>
<td>7; 22 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bellamy, Miss Eliza</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Wilmington, NC</td>
<td>Karl Boller</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 35</td>
<td>6; 21 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boird, Miss Lora</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hôtel Anker</td>
<td>4; 20 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bonesteel, Miss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Benno Seligsberg</td>
<td>Kanzleistrasse 15</td>
<td>6; 21 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosturck, C.B.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Marg. Matthes</td>
<td>Jean Paulstr. 10</td>
<td>16; 28 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Miss A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hôtel Schwarzes Ross.</td>
<td>19; 29 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Miss L.C.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hôtel Schwarzes Ross.</td>
<td>19; 29 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley, Mr. N.C., mit Tochter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Strössner (k. Landrichter a. D.)</td>
<td>Wilhelmstrasse 11</td>
<td>7; 22 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brockenhour, May</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Privatière</td>
<td>Louisville</td>
<td>Strehl.(Lehrer)</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 24</td>
<td>3; 20 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brookings, Robts.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hôtel Anker</td>
<td>3; 20 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigge, Elcie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Nashville, TN</td>
<td>Pfarrer Besold</td>
<td>Wilhelmstrasse 2</td>
<td>16; 28 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brubaker, Dr., mit Frau, und Mrs. Albert C.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>M. Ehrenschwerdt (k. Reg.-Registrar)</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 82</td>
<td>17; 28 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchman, Miss Bella</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Frau Apotheker Forster</td>
<td>Wilhelmstrasse 13</td>
<td>7; 22 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullard, Francis, Miss Mary L., und Miss Ellen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>M. Käfferlein</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 16</td>
<td>18; 29 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgess, Miss Marcia</td>
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<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Elise Conrad</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 9</td>
<td>17; 28 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson, Miss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Newark, [NJ]</td>
<td>Benno Seligsberg</td>
<td>Kanzleistrasse 15</td>
<td>8; 22 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welch, Margaret H.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Chr. Meyer</td>
<td>Leopoldstrasse 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wetherill, Miss Sara</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Hans Will (Lehrer)</td>
<td>Schulstrasse 13</td>
<td>7; 22 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetherill, Miss Christine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Hans Will (Lehrer)</td>
<td>Schulstrasse 13</td>
<td>7; 22 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wetherill, Miss Sorna</td>
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<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Hans Will (Lehrer)</td>
<td>Schulstrasse 13</td>
<td>7; 22 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wheaten, Miss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Th. Reiss</td>
<td>Richard Wagnerstrasse 79</td>
<td>10; 22 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>White, Miss Elizabeth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Benno Seligsberg</td>
<td>Kanzleistrasse 15</td>
<td>6; 21 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whitridge, Roland B.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Elise Hartmann</td>
<td>Richard Wagnerstrasse 70</td>
<td>17; 28 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilkens, H., nebst 2 Töchter, 1 Sohn</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kaufmann</td>
<td>Galveston, TX</td>
<td>Carl Trautner</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 55</td>
<td>12; 26 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams, Sarah und Johanna, mit Begleitung</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>[Not given]</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Magdalena Ordnung</td>
<td>Altbachplatz 5</td>
<td>6; 21 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolworth, J.M.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Advokat</td>
<td>Omaha, [NE]</td>
<td>B. Glenk</td>
<td>Bürgereutherstrasse 7</td>
<td>17; 28 July</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K, cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number in Party</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Staying with</th>
<th>Residence in Bayreuth</th>
<th>Fremdenlisten No. and Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workman, Dr. William, mit Frau</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[Medical Doctor]</td>
<td>Amerika</td>
<td>Schmidt</td>
<td>Lisztstrasse 6</td>
<td>12; 26 July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worpan, Edwin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Amerika</td>
<td>Albert Hübsch (Juwelier)</td>
<td>Maximillianstr. 12</td>
<td>6; 21 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse, E. Rollius und Madame</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Banquier</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Elise Conrad</td>
<td>Maxstrasse 9</td>
<td>17; 28 July</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** 257
ABBREVIATED TITLES


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“Ride of the Valkyries” (Archive No. MUS-A, 8677 ms.)
“Schluss des Vorspiels”; unfinished transcription of “Siegfried’s Rhine Journey” (Archive No. MUS-A, 8718 ms.)
“Trauermarsch beim Tode’s Siegfried”; bowings in Thomas’s hand (Archive No. MUS-B, 8726).

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Box 3, Folder 10 – Anton Seidl, Notebook of stage directions for the first performances of Der Ring des Nibelungen, Bayreuth, 1876.
Box 3, Folder 18 – Anton Seidl, “Wie Wagner selbst über Seidl dachte,” unpublished manuscript.
Box 3, Folder 30 – Anton Seidl’s copy of the libretto to Siegfried (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1876.)

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Christian Advocate, New York 1877
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The Daily Picayune, New Orleans 1895
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Die Walküre, Band 11/1-3
Siegfried, Band 12/1-3
Götterdämmerung, Band 13/1-3

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