

Wagner, Cont.

Gesamtkunstwerk - (means, “Total Art Work”)

Wagner believed that everything in his opera productions should be able to represent itself as a piece of art in itself, simultaneously working equally with the other aspects of the work to create a unified whole. For example, the libretto should be of high enough quality to be read as a play, the orchestral score should work on its own without the text, the costumes and scenery should be of high artistic quality, etc. How everything worked together in a production was so important to Wagner that he even created his own theater to support his operas.

Bayreuth Opera House

- official name, *Richard Wagner Festspielhaus*
- opera house that was conceived by Wagner and built to perform his operas
- primarily funded by King Ludwig II of Bavaria
- opened for the premier of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*
- located in Bayreuth, Germany
- Home to Bayreuth Festival, annual festival featuring performances of Wagner's operas

Watch *Bayreuth Festspielhaus Behind the Scenes* now:

<https://youtu.be/kY8zGYe5W5g>

copy and paste link into new window to watch

Important Features of Wagner's Opera House

Featured continental seating

- wedge shape

- no boxes

=every seat was equal and had an uninterrupted view of the stage

Recessed orchestra pit

- many players are hidden under the stage

= orchestra is invisible

(also balances relationship between orchestra and singers)

Der Ring des Nibelungen/The Nibelung's Ring

Series of 4 Operas by Wagner:

Das Rheingold

Die Walküre

Siegfried

Götterdämmerung

3-5 hours each in length

16-17 hours total

124 musicians in orchestra

The Ring - Story

Story, libretto, and music written by Wagner

Inspired by German and Norse Legends

Original concept derived from:

- 13th Century epic poem about a mythical race of dwarfs, The Nibelungs
- Icelandic origin epic poem about the history of the gods
- Norse mythology

Read a synopsis of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* here now:

[umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/
Teutonic_Mythology/ringsum.html](http://umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/Teutonic_Mythology/ringsum.html)

Leitmotif - “reoccurring musical theme, associated within a particular piece of music with a particular person, place or idea” that is “characterized by a single harmonic or rhythmic trait”

- A Leitmotif is representative of narrative

- It is a brief musical figure that is capable of growth, development, and transformation

- Transmutation of leitmotif demonstrates development of the leitmotif subject in the plot of the opera

- Wagner uses *Leitmotifs* throughout the *Ring Cycle* to represent characters and plot concepts not only in each opera, but from one opera to the next.

Watch this brief introduction to Leitmotifs in
Wagner's *Ring* here:

<https://youtu.be/yJ3sAW-7vm0>

The Ride of the Valkyries

from Act III of *Die Walküre*

-features the Valkyrie Leitmotif

-Valkyries have gathered to take fallen heroes to Valhalla

-This is the only ensemble piece in the first three operas of the ring cycle

-It is often performed as a purely instrumental piece

Watch *Ride of the Valkyries* video here now:

https://youtu.be/uOk_lqPIXQE