



Wotan calls Erda
Henri Fantin-Latour 1885

**17th International Congress of the
International Society of
Psychosomatic Obstetrics and
Gynaecology (ISPOG)
THE BRAIN – THE BODY – THE SOCIETY
Ceremonial address**

Prof. Dr. Susanne Vill

**‘The Woman of the Future’ –
Effects of Richard Wagner’s
Vision on the Musical and
Social Culture**

Berlin, May 22, 2013, 7 pm

In 1851, more than one and a half centuries ago, after the failure of the revolution of 1848 in which Richard Wagner was highly involved, he regarded the female antagonist Senta in his romantic opera “The Flying Dutchman” as a prefiguration of the kind of woman whom he wished to become “the woman of the future”:

“The Dutchman was punished for his boldness by the devil and condemned forever to sail restlessly on the ocean. He longs for dying to end his pain [...] and] may achieve his redemption [...] if a woman immolates herself for him: his yearning for death leads him to seek after this woman; but this woman is no longer Penelope, whom Odysseus married long ago and who takes care of his home, but she is the woman in general, the not yet existing, desired, foreshadowed, endlessly feminine woman, - in one word: the woman of the future.”¹

For Wagner Senta’s sacrifice for the Dutchman, her suicide, meant that the purpose of her life had been fulfilled and she died of love - a “Liebestod” almost like Isolde’s in “Tristan and Isolde” – to join her beloved in the afterworld.

Looking at Senta’s part in Wagner’s opera, his vision turns out to be a projection, a wish for a person, who doubtlessly trusts in a beloved man (even if he lies to her and betrays her), who spends the whole of her attention, love and energy for him and is ready even to commit suicide in order to make him believe in his salvation. In his “Message for my Friends” Wagner adds the wish for comfort, true love and security in a spiritually and politically safe home. His belief

in Christian salvation through Christ's death turns to a wish for experiencing redemption through love. He understands Jesus' death as the most accomplished act of love, the ultimate transformation of egoism into altruism. In a woman's total surrender to a beloved man he wants to find charity, a mergence like that of lovers and an abstinence from the ego's desire in favor of another person.² In Wagner's writings, especially in "Opera and Drama" he describes women as dependent persons who totally rely on men, who lack any kind of autonomy and almost any power of their own except the power to love and surrender to a man.

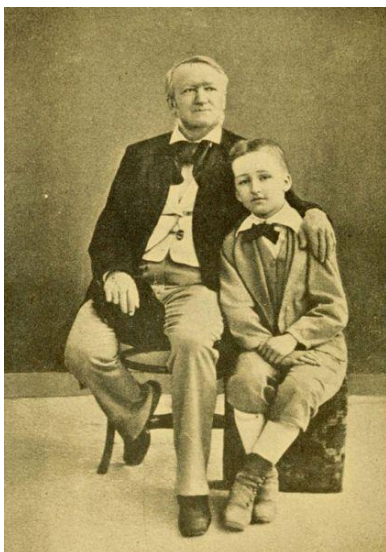
"Love is in women's nature: but it is the receptive love that in conception totally devotes itself. The woman receives her individuality only in the moment of surrender. She is a girl flowing in her element like a wave till she receives her soul by a man's love. [...] The true woman loves unconditionally, because she must love. She has no choice, except if she does not love. But if she has to love, she feels an immense [force] bondage which for the first time develops her will."³

And thus Wagner believed a woman to gain her individuality just by reflecting the individuality of the beloved man.

More than 150 years afterwards it is hard to believe that an intelligent person uttered such a conviction of female characters – and even harder to believe that according to Wagner's ideal of female sacrifice at that time women really committed suicide in order to offer their lovers or husbands an impulse of inspiration for their creativity.

Yet the concept of female deficiency is evident in many literary sources of the time,⁴ it obviously was a part of the contemporary ideology to make women believe in their total dependence on men. The suggestion that women should sacrifice their lives and power to men functioned well in order to prevent women from becoming rivals in business and politics.

Regarding the types of woman in Wagner's operas and music dramas we realize that the dramatist was closer to what women were to become in future than the writer would have admitted.



Wagner completed ten operas/ music dramas:

Die Feen (1833–1834) World Premiere 1888

Das Liebesverbot oder Die Novize von Palermo (1834–1836)
WP 1836

Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen (1837–1840) WP 1842

Der Fliegende Holländer (1840–1841, revised 1852
and 1864) WP 1843

Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg (1842–1845,
revised 1847, 1861, 1875) WP 1845

Lohengrin (1845–1848) WP 1850

Der Ring des Nibelungen:

Das Rheingold (1851–1854) WP 1869

Die Walküre (1851–1856) WP 1870

Siegfried (1851–1871) WP 1876

Götterdämmerung (1848–1874) WP 1876

Tristan und Isolde (1856–1859) WP 1865

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (1845–1867) WP 1868

Parsifal (1865–1882) WP 1882

In these operas there is a big variety of types of female characters:

Types of Female Characters

Goddesses: Venus, Erda, Fricka, Freia, Brünnhilde

Mythological elementary /nature spirits: Norns, Valkyries, Rhinemaidens

Fairies: Ada, Zemira, Farzana

Emanations of nature: bird in the forest, flower maidens

Innocent victims: Ada, Senta, Elisabeth, Elsa, Brünnhilde, Isolde

Lovers: women in Venus' mountain, Sieglinde, Isolde, Eva, Gutrune

Unselfish, self-sacrificing lovers: Senta, Elisabeth

Confidants, maids: Drolla, Dorella, Brangäne

Sisters: Lora (*Die Feen*), Isabella (*Liebesverbot*), Irene (*Rienzi*), Gutrune

Wives: Mariana (*Liebesverbot*), noblewomen (*Tannhäuser*), Ortrud, Fricka

Nurses: Mary, Magdalena

A schemer, greedy for power: Ortrud

A seductress in need of redemption: Kundry

A witch: (in a tale) Dilnovaz (*Feen*)

In 1851 when Wagner idealized Senta as his “woman of the future”, different types of women had already entered his stage and he had started to work on the “Ring of the Nibelung”. In “Tannhäuser” there was a Goddess Venus who made the singer-poet perceive the narrow limits of his delight but also welcomed the faithless lover when he wanted to return to her. There was Elisabeth whom he compromised comparing her to Venus but who nevertheless saved him from the lynching of the Wartburg society. In “Lohengrin” there was Elsa who would not accept a husband concealing his identity from her. Elsa’s refusal of Lohengrin’s demand never to ask for his name and provenience is often misunderstood as her lack of faith, but for Wagner it was her special quality:

„This woman who consciously hurls herself into vitiation because of the necessary essence of love, – who – when feeling a wallowing admiration – is ready to perish, if she cannot comprise her beloved, this woman who in contact with Lohengrin had to perish in order to commit him too to vitiation, this woman who could not but love in this way, who gets from charmed adoration into love’s real nature by the outburst of her jealousy and who reveals this nature of her vitiation to the uncomprehending, this superb woman, in front of whom Lohengrin had to vanish because he was not able to understand her – I had discovered her now, and [...] I had to relinquish my Lohengrin in order certainly to find out true femininity that shall bring redemption to me and all the world, after male egoism, even in its noblest

form, broke down deleting itself in confrontation with it. – Elsa, the woman, [...] tuned me into a revolutionary. She was the spirit of the people whom I longed for as a man and artist for my salvation.”⁵

After Senta who sacrificed herself and saved the condemned Dutchman, now it was the rebelliously demanding Elsa who sacrificed her savior but whom Wagner nevertheless believed to be able to save the world!

Then a real doctor, specialist in Celtic Druid naturopathy entered Wagner’s stage: Isolde the so called “best doctor” saved Tristan’s life by healing his wounds after he had fought and killed her groom. Aiming for revenge, she stands with a sword at his bed, but looking into his eyes, she falls in love with her patient. She let him go, but returning home he offers her as a bride to King Marke who sends him back to bring her to Cornwall. The Irish queen, Isolde’s mother, gave her a box of medicine containing a poison for ending unbearable suffering and a love potion for inflaming her unknown husband’s heart for Isolde. When Tristan sticks to his impeccable manners and leaves Isolde alone on board of the ship, she commands him to see her. Realizing that he would not love her, she asks her maid to serve the poison for withdrawing his life that she had saved and also escape from a future marriage with an unloved man. But the maid serves the love potion. Whatever aphrodisiac this could have been – maybe drinking the potion as poison just freed the lovers from anxious courtesy and allowed their passion to break through! Wolfgang Wagner gave an interesting interpretation: Tristan is traumatized by the knowledge that his mother died in giving birth to him. Ever since he cannot dare to love, because he believes that his love will kill the beloved woman. Only after Isolde revealed to him, that she was not afraid of death but ready to join him in a wonderful afterworld, he dares to confess his love for her. - Isolde as therapist of Tristan’s psyche sets him free for facing and analyzing his fear of love. After being discovered in his rendezvous with Isolde and being exposed as fraud and adulterer to the king, he tries to commit suicide falling into Melot’s sword, but he still had to clear his mind from the false idea that only in afterlife he could be with Isolde. Waiting for his “best doctor” he reflects on his life and finally has a vision of Isolde no longer in the darkness of the night, but in bright and shining sunlight, what completes his psychotherapy. After blocking his fear of love for years in his subconscious, he now overcomes it and gains the freedom to love. So, he fulfills the purpose of his life. Trying to force Isolde to join him in Kareol, he – in a kind of magic incantation – opens his wound as if his blood could attract her with more power than his desire. Isolde’s “Liebestod” has been understood as a psychogenic self-annihilation, a sudden loss of the will to live when the mental merge with the beloved person fails to satisfy the wish of two souls to conjoin.

Yet leaving the earth in death and transfiguration was not a proper solution für Wagner’s political and social visions. After Goethe’s “The Sorrows of Young Werther” had misled so many unfortunate lovers to commit suicide, another work of art, even more powerful than a novel by it’s enchanting music, should not end in a similar scandal.

So the question of Wagner the revolutionary was: how to rescue the world from a capitalism greedy for sacrifices of the weak, the poor, the socially disadvantaged, the women and their children.

In Norse, Germanic, Celtic and Greek mythology Wagner found types of women with much stronger characteristics than those of the Christianized areas of Europe where women submissively accepted the ideal of the blessed sufferings of Our Lady Maria. Already in “Tannhäuser” Wagner counterbalanced the lack of female goddesses in Christianity by adding Venus as an erotic antagonist of Virgin Maria to the characters of his opera. After four revisions Wagner at the end of his life still believed “to owe the world a ‘Tannhäuser’”.⁶ There is a wide gap between the luxurious erotic delight in the mountain of Venus and the moral commitments of the medieval society’s ethics. The pope’s flourishing crook demonstrates his wrong judgment. But Elisabeth had prayed for his absolution and her death could have assumed his penalty. Again the woman was a victim – marriage, children, a family were impossible and Wagner’s aim to criticize the catholic pope’s rigid commandments as hostile to sexuality was mixed with an approval of Elisabeth’s sacrifice – her life paid for his guilt.

In many mythologies Wagner found goddesses who are superior or equal to the male gods, and he selected and combined several of their characteristics. In his “Ring of the Nibelung” he set Erda⁷ as an omniscient goddess of the earth and fertility who could create children on her own like the Greek Gaia, in opposition to Wotan. In order to get a powerful protagonist, Wagner had his Wotan command the Valkyries, who in mythology were prophetesses, sorceresses, warriors and rulers possessing the power of fate beyond the god’s sphere of influence. Wotan believes to overcome Erda, the symbol of life and natural creation – till he ends in the flames lit by her and his daughter Brünnhilde. Wotan’s attempts to abase Erda and humiliate Brünnhilde fail. But in the “Ring” there are women who dare to live according to their own ideas. The Rhinemaidens rebuff their suitor Alberich. Sieglinde leaves her husband to follow her twin brother and lover Siegmund into the wilderness. Brünnhilde supports Siegmund in his fight with Hunding in spite of her different order. Erda rebukes Wotan’s arrogance. Brünnhilde saves Sieglinde with her baby. She succeeds in persuading Wotan to reduce her punishment and thus chooses her future liberator herself. Brünnhilde punishes Siegfried for his betrayal and turns him over to his assassin. Then she set fire to Wotan’s castle Walhall, knowing that her father stayed there. Returning the condemned ring, purified in the flames, to the Rhinemaidens, she relieves the human survivors of the “Götterdämmerung” from the curse of the looted gold. In Siegfried Wagner had attempted to create a hero free from the burdens of knowledge, history and consciousness – the one and only trustworthy savior of a rotten society. But his ignorant naivety was not the clue, and even if generations of audiences saw the “Ring” as Wotan’s and Siegfried’s drama, at the end it was Brünnhilde, a female hero who became a prototype of modern women: self-reliant, knowing about the desires and seducibility of humans, critical, just, consequent, helpful, altruistic and capable of loving and surrender.



Richard Wagner, Das Rheingold: Director: La Fura dels Baus - Carlus Padrissa, Sets: Roland Olbeter, Costumes: Chu Uroz. Palau de les Arts de Valencia and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino 2007 (DVD 2009)

Wagner followed the tradition of 18th century theatre to emphasize the relation between children and their father by leaving out their mothers, and he left his heroes without living mothers – Arindal, Ada, Senta, Elisabeth, Elsa, Lohengrin, Siegmund, Siegfried, Tristan, Eva, Walther von Stolzing, Parsifal. Sieglinde in the „Ring“ was the first woman in Wagner’s operas and music dramas to become pregnant and give birth to Siegfried, and in fact fertility is the true subject of the longest tetralogy in the history of opera: “The Ring of the Nibelung”. The plot puts some questions:

- Why have three women, freely swimming in the river, to take care of the gold?
- How could the relinquishment of love enable someone to forge a magic ring?
- And how could a golden ring become an instrument of the power to force, oppress and exploit people?

The round form of the ring seems to be a symbol for the admission to reproduction and the creation of a hierarchy, guarded and offered in love by women. A man who is not welcome, may want to enforce his chance and forge something that could demonstrate his power to get and grant access. But he will have to dispense with love and to content himself with lust or other substitutes, also greed and workaholism aiming for experiences of success. In order to force a woman to stay faithful to one man, in former times chastity belts used a metal ring to prohibit a woman’s free love. So men gained a certain power to control the possibility of the women’s childbearing and prevent to raise children of other men.

Up to 2007 (as far as I know) no staging visualized this perspective of the subject – had it been too obvious? In their Valencia “Ring” Carlus Padrissa and La Fura dels Baus first showed that

fertility is the treasure guarded by the Rhinemaidens. In many cultures such as Egypt and India the “golden child” is a symbol of the life-giving sun’s creature, in Christian mythology Maria gives birth to Jesus, the “light of the world”. In “Rheingold” it’s the rising sun that makes the gold shine temporarily, like women’s fertility is available only temporarily.

[**VIDEOCLIP** „Das Rheingold“⁸ 00:17:54 –00:27:12 Rheintöchter, golden babies as “Rheingold”; Woglinde: Christina Obregón, Wellgunde: Ana Ibarra, Flosshilde: Francisca Beaumont, Alberich: Gunther von Kannen]

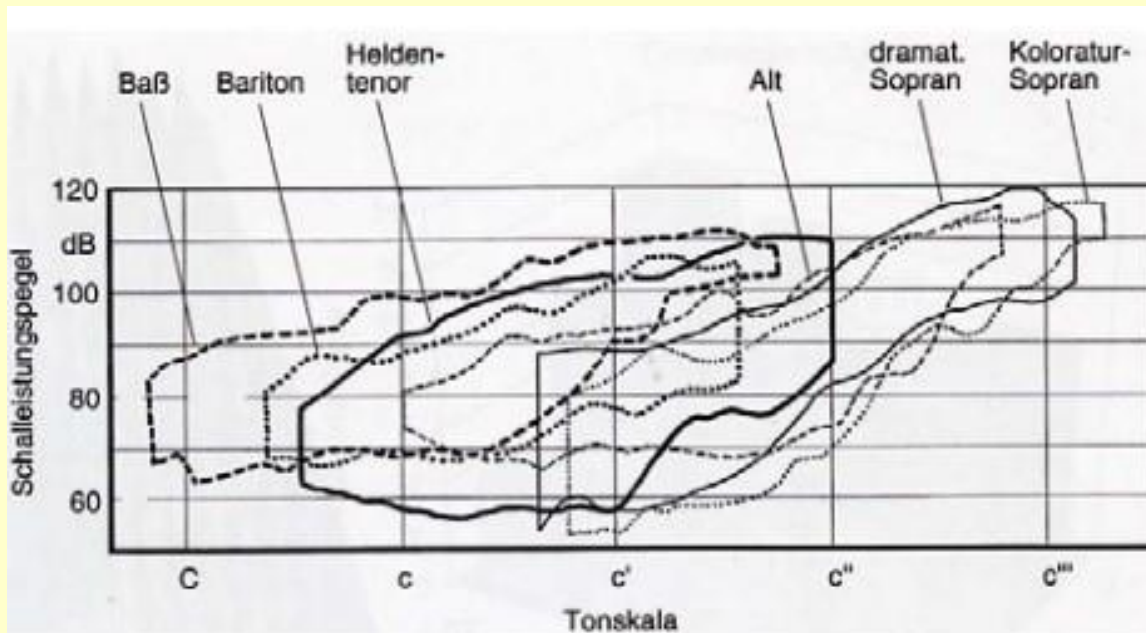
In his last music drama „Parsifal“ Wagner mixed oriental and occidental mythical sources and psychological patterns in the character of the female antagonist. Kundry bears Ahasver’s guilt to have laughed at the suffering Christ and ever since she searches forgiveness and believes she could find it in a man’s loving surrender. As a compulsive seductress she offers and promises love, but she is fixed on her own sake to be cured and freed from her curse. Parsifal knows real love which he lived to see in his mother, and in spite of lacking sexual experiences he perceives Kundry’s addiction in her allurements. He rejects her sexual offer what breaks the vicious circle of her dependence. For a long time this example of an addiction therapy had been neglected in the reception of the opera which focused on the religious topic of the suffering guardian of the Grail. Wagner’s concept of Kundry and her death in front of the Grail was offended as misogynic, a fatal setback after his glorious Brünnhilde. Kundry’s death could also be seen as a fulfillment of her life, but since the 1980s Wolfgang Wagner and many other stage directors had Kundry participate in the revealment of the Grail and even take it out of its depository.

There is still another aspect of Wagner’s perception of women: In his “Opera and Drama” he wrote about the essence of music: “Music is a woman”,⁹ and he compares his idea of a true kind of music to his concept of the true woman who conceives the gift of a man’s love and is ready to give birth to it. Thus the poet creates the drama and the musician receives its inspiration and surrenders to it.

In fact Wagner’s music proved to become his most powerful influence on the development of the arts and their social efficiency. Adapting the expansion of the orchestra from Hector Berlioz’ oeuvre Wagner lifted the sound level of the musical production. In order to give the voices a better chance to predominate the acoustic output he covered the orchestra in the Bayreuth festival house with the floor of the stage.

Yet only the biggest and strongest voices could stand through the parts of his heroes and heroines. His new voice type of the highly dramatic soprano, also called the “Wagnerian Soprano”, achieves the highest possible sound exposure level of human voices with 120 decibel. With their special singer’s formants the voices are louder than most of the orchestral instruments.

Dynamics of Singing Voices



In: Jürgen Meyer: Akustik und musikalische Aufführungspraxis, Berlin 1999

Wagner added another demand to his interpreters: the singer should not only sing the notes of the score but should allow the role which she interpreted to take over the command of her expression. The singer should relinquish herself and become a medium of the spirit of the play. Wagner learned that this kind of self-abandonment in the vocal part of an opera was possible by watching Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient and from then on he also wanted his singer-actors to transcend their personal consciousness in the performance of the roles. In many cultures and shamanic rites music and especially singing is used to get into altered states of consciousness, but in western traditions of high cultured musical products the score fixed every pitch, duration of the notes and every motion of the interpreters. Almost no freedom was left for individual emotions and timing. But with his demand that the singer should relinquish herself in her role, Wagner reactivated the cultural consciousness for this important impact of music. It flourished in the 20th century in the revival of improvisation. Music bands created and played their own music in order to experience the freedom and flow of creation and ecstasy.

So, on one hand Wagner stressed the overwhelming vocal sound which was so much bigger than the physical extension of the human body, and which became a special sign and means of power. It caused an increasing desire of the audience for experiences of immersion in the visual and acoustic performance of the music drama. The wish to be surrounded by sounds that touch the entire body with it's vibrations spread all over the world and lead to the development of a technical equipment that could create acoustic environments even for huge masses of people who felt to become a community under the influence of the music. The amplification of the sound and it's emission via loudspeakers started the most comprehensive evolution in the

history of music. Recording and replaying music made it available for everybody everywhere at any time.

And on the other hand Wagner's claim for the singer's self-abandonment in singing, the outbursts of excitement, indignation and rage of his characters, the endless melodies and soundscapes in his scores led to a broader awareness in the public that music could also function as a clue to transcendence.

"If music be the food of love – give me excess of it", says Shakespeare's love-sick Count Orsino in "Twelfth Night or What You Will". And in fact, music became a general means to feed the people's hunger for comfort, tender caresses, energizing and activation. Composers of the following generations, especially in popular music, tried to create a kind of music, which could convey the feeling of security, comfort, pleasure and ecstatic rapture. New musical styles have been developed, using Wagner's big orchestral sound and the strong voices which turned from singing to shouting voices in Jazz and to screaming voices in the revolutionary beginning of the rock-movement. The beauty of the belcanto voice was no longer accepted as a representative of humans in the contemporary society but it was suspected to embellish the expression of the majority of the people who suffered from exploitation. Those voices, which could express the feelings of the majority sounded of hardness, noise, pressure, they screamed out their excitement and pain, what their audience accepted as a more realistic sound of their living conditions. Ever since the amplifiers provided a high sound level that easily offer an immersion into music as a possibility to escape from personal and social problems.

In its artificial development western "high culture" music had concentrated on perfection instead of the freedom of musical expression. It led to more and more control of the musical process, fixed all musical parameters and thereby dispensed with the potency of music to drive singers, players and listeners into ecstasy. This power of music is regularly used in religious rites and shamanic healing in many cultures of the world. Wagner attempted to gain some of its power back by choosing mythical subjects, through-composed acts without formal breaks, dispensing with musical ornaments, creating endless melodies and impressionist soundscapes and proposing the singer's self-abandonment in singing. Yet there was his score, and the singer has to fit into the rhythmic patterns what permits certain altered states of mind but no complete trance. Nevertheless Wagner's abundant music was also consumed like a drug already immediately after its first performance. After the depression of the world wars and the devaluation of Wagner's music in the Third Reich its influence melted with free jazz and ethnic music that initiated new styles of music such as intuitive and improvised music which allowed more freedom of expression. In the popular music since the 60ies the wish to experience ecstasy through music and also to involve the audience in this process became predominant.

The worldwide acceptance of popular music and its electronic distribution in concerts, discos and MP3 players needs no further proof of its importance for the people's emotional nourishment and balance.

Yet only recently biologists, physicians, neurophysiologists and musicologists started scientific research on the effects of music on the human brain and body.

Their results open a wide range of possibilities to change physical conditions by listening to pleasant music, playing such music, and the strongest impact is conveyed by singing. These musical activities can harmonize and synchronize the neuronal patterns of activities which are generated in different parts of the brain. Gerhard Hüther, neurobiologist, writes:

“The more this effect of harmonization is extended on those subcortical parts which are responsible for the regulation of the integrative regulative system in the body (the limbic system, hypothalamus and the brainstem) the more effective is the reconstitution of functions (cardiovascular system, neuroendocrine system, vegetative system, immune system) which had been irritated by strain, restlessness and stress.”¹⁰

The activation of emotions by means of music is able to touch older structures of the brain and create new ways for neurotransmission. In this process many molecular cues are spilled: noradrenalin, dopamine, corticotrophin releasing hormones, vasopressin, beta-endorphin, which prepare the new circuitries.¹¹ Singing and playing music can help to find new regulations of emotions, and the effect increases the more intensive the emotional involvement in the musical activities are. Endorphin, oxytocin and dopamine prepare the integration of the new experiences in the singer’s mind. Music therapy can also help people after a stroke to reactivate their disabled limbs and memory.

Physical reactions to pleasant music in listening, playing and singing II

Activation of emotions touches older structures of the brain

- **new ways for neurotransmission**
- **noradrenalin, dopamine, corticotrophin releasing hormones, vasopressin, beta-endorphin**
- **new regulations of emotions**
- **endorphin, oxytocin and dopamine prepare the integration of the new experiences in the singer’s mind**
- **thrills → spill of endogenic opiates like endorphins**
- **similar effects like special food, sex or drugs**
- **thrills reduce anxiety and lift the disposition for learning**

A.J. Blood, R.J. Zatorre: Intensely pleasurable responses to music correlate with activity in brain regions implicated in reward and emotion. PNAE 98, S. 1181-1183

When loud music, especially singing touches the saccules in the ear, the special frequency of the voices transmit their impulses to the nucleus accumbens in the brain and trigger feelings of joy, delight and thrills. Thrills indicate the spill of endogenic opiates like endorphins, the effects

are similar like those of some special food, sex or drugs.¹² The experience of thrills reduces anxiety and lifts the disposition for learning.

The sounds of music can produce different kinds of altered states of consciousness:

- ergotropic induction leads to ecstasy
- trophotropic induction leads to self-absorption.

In alertness beta waves (14-40 waves per second) dominate. Calming down the alpha waves (7-14 waves per second) take over and a relaxation response follows with better connectedness of the left and right sides of the brain. When singing reduces the exhaling of breath the baroreceptors are stimulated, and with a general process of harmonization theta or delta waves may occur in intensive states of ecstasy or self-absorption. The question, if the vibrato of human voices could induce theta waves is still researched.

Reactions to music especially singing:

- touch the saccules in the ear, the frequency of the voices
- impulses to the nucleus accumbens
- feelings of joy, delight, thrills

Thrills: spill of endogenic opiates like endorphins

- effects like those of special food, sex or drugs
- thrills reduce anxiety and lift the disposition for learning

Altered states of consciousness through music:

- ergotropic induction leads to ecstasy
- trophotropic induction leads to self-absorption.

The Waves:

alertness - beta waves (14-40 waves per second)

rest - alpha waves (7-14 waves per second)

Reduction of exhaling of breath stimulates the baroreceptors

- theta or delta waves in intensive states of ecstasy or self-absorption
- the vibrato of human voices may also induce theta waves

A.J. Blood, R.J. Zatorre: Intensely pleasurable responses to music correlate with activity in brain regions implicated in reward and emotion. PNAE 98, p. 1181 -1183

Singing can function as antidepressant. Stephen Clift and Grenville Hanox¹³ proved that singing reduces stress and improves the singer's mood. In a choir

- 89% felt intensive happiness
- 79% less stress
- 87% had a social advantage from singing in the choir
- 75% emotional
- 58% physical and
- 49% spiritual advantage from singing in the choir.

Adrenalin can be reduced by singing, and the Japanese expert in evolution Hajime Fukui found out that in men testosterone and cortisol is reduced under the influence of singing what also reduced the tendency of aggression. In men and boys groups aggression could be lowered to an extent of about 50%. The World Health Organization recognizes as one of the greatest problems of mankind the emotional depletion of children and the loss of empathy throughout the world. Singing and playing music could help to slow down this fatal tendency.

The positive effect of music on children can start already in pregnancy. The embryos react to sounds, in some cases the children in their postnatal life could even recognize the songs which their mothers had sung or heard.¹⁴ The amniotic fluid conducts the sound to the embryo's ears, only the high frequencies are absorbed, but also the mother's bones conduct the sound to the embryo, and the pelvic functions like a big amplifier. As a singer hears his own sound with a reduction of about 10 dB, the embryo will probably also receive a reduced intensity. The mother's voice is very important for the development of the child's health, especially premature infants in an incubator receive comfort and support from their mother's voice.¹⁵ Tierpitz mentions that a professional singer told her that during the birth of her child, it's heartbeat stopped till the midwife encouraged her to sing loudly what really started the heartbeat of the child again and it could be born alive.¹⁶

Very loud sounds can harm the mother and the embryo and cause deafness. If the pregnant women had to suffer from noise, their children were comparatively lightweight a similar effect like that of starving mothers who miss vitamins and minerals during their pregnancy¹⁷. Extreme noise like starting aircrafts (about 120 dB) are supposed to cause prematurity and even stillbirth.¹⁸

Insofar as music is concerned, Wagner's influence on the increasing sound level included a perilous development. But most of the effects of music are positive. Feelings of flow, which Mihaly Csikszentmihaly recognized as essential for a life full of happiness, are well known to musicians. Flow enhances self-confidence, constructiveness, harmony in thoughts, emotions and wants, positive relations with others and it also facilitates creativity. Finally, emotional exaltations, ecstasies and transcendental experiences result in a more robust health – sounds for becoming safe and sound?

Music can (according to Gabrielson and Lindström)¹⁹

- reduce physical pain
- relieve mourning, give comfort and hope
- overcome depression
- loosen conscious and unconscious blocks to get back to hidden thoughts and emotions
- evoke feelings of openness and freedom
- provide an insight into one's own kind of living, relations and reality
- convey the feeling to be accepted by others and enhance self-confidence
- be used to confirm, intensify and change one's own state of mind
- produce a strong feeling of one's own identity, the living conditions and existence.

The immaterial power of music can produce many reactions in the human body – but it cannot father a child. This – still – demands physical conception.



Der Ring Des Nibelungen
Director: Kasper Bech Holten
Conductor: Michael Schönwandt
Set and Costume Designers: Marie í Dali and Steffen Aarfing
Royal Opera House Copenhagen 2006

Götterdämmerung (finale)
Brünnhilde: Irene Theorin



In Wagner's *Ring* there is only Sieglinde who had a baby from her brother and lover Siegmund, but at the end of the tetralogy Wagner set the motif of her praise "O hehrstes Wunder" [oh sublime miracle] with which she thanked Brünnhilde for saving her and her child, to Brünnhilde's last words. This analogy inspired Kasper Bech Holten, director of the Copenhagen *Ring* in 2006, to cancel Brünnhilde's suicide: "She doesn't die in order to bring salvation – like a male opera composer imagined it. This is no longer possible, it's male fantasy, that Violetta, Cho Cho San, Senta and Brünnhilde and who else have to be dead at the end. We don't want that: Brünnhilde survives, is pregnant with Siegfried's baby and with this motif at the end she gave birth to the baby, full of mourning for Siegfried, but also full of hope that his baby faces the future."²⁰

[VIDEOCLIP: *Götterdämmerung* Finale, R: Kasper Bech Holten, Royal Opera Copenhagen, Brünnhilde (Irene Théorin and the baby together with the "redemption motif" 00:07:53]

¹Richard Wagner: *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen: Vierter Band*, p. 2045f. www.digitale-bibliothek.de/band107.htm; translation: Vill

² see ibd. p. 5791

³ Richard Wagner: *Werke, Schriften und Briefe, Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen: Dritter Band*. S. 1575

⁴ see Silke Leopold: *Von der Allgewalt vollsten Hingebungseifers. Weibs-Bilder in Wagners Ring*. In: Udo Bernbach, Dieter Borchmeyer (Hrsg.): *Richard Wagner „Der Ring des Nibelungen“*. Ansichten des Mythos. Stuttgart: Metzler 195, S. 59-74

⁵ Wagner, R.: *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* (1851) a.a.O. Bd. VI S. 278

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- ⁷ See Susanne Vill: Aspekte der Erda-Gestalt in Wagners „Ring“ - Mythische Quellen und musikdramaturgische Gestaltung, In: In: U. Bernbach (Hg.): "Alles ist nach seiner Art" - Figuren in Richard Wagners "Ring des Nibelungen". Stuttgart: Metzler-Verlag 2001 S. 198-224
- ⁸ Director: La Fura dels Baus - Carlus Padrissa, Sets: Roland Olbeter, Costumes: Chu Uroz, Lighting: Peter Van Praet, Videos: Franc Aleu, Palau de les Arts de Valencia and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Soloists, Orquesta de la Comunitat Valenciana. recording 2007, DVD edition 2009
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- ¹⁰ Gerhard Hüther: Ebenen salutogenetischer Wirkungen auf das Gehirn. Musiktheaterapeutische Umschau 2004, Bd. 25 H. 1, H. Göttingen S. 16-26
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- ¹⁷ Tessa Roseboom in: Wie wir werden was wir sind, Dokumentation von Nicola Cook, BBC 2011, ZDF-Info 1.5.2013 12:00-12:45h
- ¹⁸ Wolfgang Bossinger: Die heilende Kraft des Singens. Battweiler 2006 S. 68
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- ²⁰ Kasper Bech Holten in: Ansichten eines Mythos. Zur gegenwärtigen Verortung von Wagners *Ring*, in: Isolde Schmid-Reiter (Hg.): *Richard Wagners Der Ring des Nibelungen – Europäische Traditionen und Paradigmen*, Regensburg 2010 S. 232-214

Abstract

Prof. Dr. Susanne Vill

„The Woman of the Future“ – Effects of Richard Wagner’s Vision on the Musical and Social Culture

Richard Wagner’s female characters are heroines, fighters, liberators, and they inspired the woman’s liberation movement on the continent since the 19th century. Performers of Isolde in “Tristan and Isolde” and of Brünnhilde in “The Ring of the Nibelung” had the biggest voices ever heard in opera in order to convey the power of the visionary figures by the power of the voices. They also needed an extreme amount of strength for standing the exhausting roles. The big voices and Wagner’s enlarged orchestra created a special vehemence of the music which conveyed stronger vibrations to the audience thus creating an immersion area. The feeling of security, comfort, pleasure and ecstatic rapture became qualities of the music, which the composers of the following generations tried to achieve, especially in popular music. But Wagner’s music could also function as a drug which produced an addiction for being surrounded by more and more intensive sounds. The increasing sound level has special effects on the listeners and also on embryos, whereas music therapy uses the healing power of the music. The essential aspect of Wagner’s idea of the “Woman of the Future” was the female love, surrender and devotion to a beloved man. At the beginning of the “century of the women” we may reconsider the impact of his vision for women of today.