College-Conservatory of Music

presents

2008–09 Performing Arts Series

Saturday, June 6, 2009
Patricia Corbett Theater
8:00 p.m.

Philharmonia Orchestra
Wagner and Cinema:
“Redemption Through Love”

Mark Gibson, music director and conductor
Tony Palmer, film director
Barbara Honn, soprano
Thomas Baresel, tenor
Kenneth Shaw, bass-baritone

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Saturday, June 6, 2009
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PROGRAM

Overture to Der fliegende Holländer (1841)  Richard Wagner  
(1813-1883)  
Aik Khai Pung, conductor

from Tristan und Isolde, Der Ring des Nibelungen  
Der fliegende Holländer, and Tannhäuser  
film montage by Tony Palmer*

Sequence of the music:

1. from Siegfried, Act 3: Orchestral introduction, “Brünnhilde’s Awakening”
2. from Der fliegende Holländer, Act 1: Aria of Holländer, “Die Frist ist um.”
3. from Götterdämmerung, Prologue: Beginning of Prelude
4. from Götterdämmerung, Prologue:  
   Orchestral interlude, “Dawn”  
   Siegfried and Brünnhilde, “Zu neuen Thaten…Mehr gabst du, Wunderfrau”
5. from Tristan und Isolde, Act 3: Beginning of Prelude
6. from Tannhäuser, Act 3, Scene 2:  
   Orchestral introduction  
   Scene and Aria of Wolfram, “Wie Todesahnung…O du mein holder Abendstern”
7. from Tristan und Isolde: Continuation of Prelude to Act 3
8. from Tristan und Isolde, Act 3: Isolde, “Mild und leise”

   Barbara Honn, soprano  
   Thomas Baresel, tenor  
   Kenneth Shaw, bass-baritone

Program Notes (cont.)

I shall respect them but I shall direct them. The result will be counterpoint; that is, sound and image will not run together both saying the same thing at the same time, neutralizing each other.

In the concluding sequence of Palmer’s montage that accompanies the “Liebestod,” the visual focus is not Isolde or any of Wagner’s women but King Ludwig II of Bavaria, a devoted patron of Wagner. In the corresponding scene of Palmer’s original film Wagner, the narrator reports that the king died, “seeking redemption.” Thus, unlike Cocteau’s accidental synchronization, Palmer’s visuals do correspond to Gibson’s musical theme of redemption at least in the final sequence of the montage. Yet the film director’s visual representation of the theme is different from the conductor’s interpretation of it: King Ludwig II as Isolde. And the audience is invited to participate in this interpretive process of discovering “the third meaning” of redemption through one’s own experience of the surreptitious interplay between music and image.

Notes by Jeongwon Joe, Associate Professor of Musicology, CCM. Professor Joe is co-editor of Between Opera and Cinema (Routledge, 2002) and Wagner and Cinema (Indiana University Press, forthcoming in 2009), and author of Opera as Soundtrack (Ashgate, forthcoming in 2011).

Tony Palmer is an award-winning British film and stage director. A Cambridge graduate, he studied with Ken Russell and Jonathan Miller, and produced over 100 narrative films and documentaries about musicians, ranging from such classical composers and performers as Stravinsky, Puccini, Britten, Rachmaninoff, Wagner, Maria Callas, and Yehudi Menuhin to numerous pop and jazz musicians, such as Frank Zappa, The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and Scott Joplin. His opera staging includes Britten’s Peter Grimes at the Zurich Opera House (1991), Wagner’s Parsifal in St. Petersburg (1997) and Moscow (1998), and John Adams’ The Death of Klinghoffer in Helsinki (2001). Among the international prizes Palmer won are 12 Gold Medals from the New York Film Festival, Emmy Awards, British Academy Film Awards, and a Sony Award for best arts program, which he received for his BBC Radio 3 program “Night Waves.” He is currently shooting a documentary about Wagner titled, The Wagner Family: A Story of Betrayal, which will be released later this year. To order his DVDs, see http://www.tonypalmerdvd.com/

The Wagner and cinema concert, “Redemption Through Love,” is sponsored by the Mariann Steegman Foundation in Germany and the office of Dean Douglas Knehans of CCM.
They must confess they belong only to each other. No end, now, to the yearning, the desire, the bliss, the suffering of love; world, power, fame, splendor, honor, knighthood, loyalty, friendship—all scattered like an empty dream. One thing alone still living: yearning, yearning, unquenchable, ever-regenerated longing—anguishing, thirsting; the only redemption—death, extinction, eternal sleep.”

Tristan and Isolde glorify death in their love duet in Act 2: “Now banish all fearing/Sweetest death/Longed for and hoped for/Love in death!”; and the opera concludes with Isolde’s “Liebestod,” the culmination of redemption through love in death. And like Wagner’s opera, the Philharmonia concert ends with the “Liebestod.”

Tony Palmer’s film created for the Philharmonia concert is a montage from his nearly eight-hour biographical picture, Wagner, produced in 1983 in commemoration of the centennial of the composer’s death. In this film, Richard Burton played the title role. Like Bill Viola’s video images in The Tristan Project, Palmer’s montage is not a naive illustration of the musical theme. In many places, Palmer’s images are equivocal in relation to music, providing another layer of meaning yet to be interpreted by the audience: for instance, one will see on the screen the images of the Nibelungen dwarfs, forging the Ring, while hearing an excerpt from the Prelude to Act 3 of Tristan. The effect, then, is ironic, as it resembles the “alienation effect” of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theater, which was intended to be an aesthetic antidote to Wagnerian’s Gesamtkunstwerk, demanding not integration but separation of each component of the drama. Brecht wrote:

So long as the expression ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ (or ‘integrated work of art’) means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be ‘fused’ together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere, ‘feed’ to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against.

The narrative or semiotic polyphony between music and image in the Gibson-Palmer collaboration can also be illuminated in light of poststructuralists’ claim for the inherent multiplicity of meaning in any artwork: hence comes Roland Barthes’ theory of “the third meaning,” which he demonstrates by analyzing Sergei Eisenstein’s monumental film Ivan the Terrible (1944-1958). Some film directors deliberately disrupt the narrative parallelism between music and image. What Jean Cocteau called “accidental synchronization” is an example.

In Le Sang [d’un Poète], I shifted the musical sequences [composed by George Auric], which were too close to the images, in order to obtain ac-
tial element for filmmaking. Through his leitmotif technique, Wagner systematically used musical themes to represent various elements of the drama, such as characters (Siegfried, the dragon, etc.), concepts (yearning, death, etc), and objects (the ring, the sword, etc.), and it is this technique that has drawn particular attention from many early film artists and critics. Erno Rapée, the compiler of *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures* (1925), noted that “‘Leit Motiv’… is the one which can best be applied in scoring pictures,” and he extolled Wagner as “the greatest dramatic Composer of all ages.” Wagner's cinematic imagination can also be found at more detailed levels of his libretti.

The first notes of the ritornello in the aria accompany the Dutchman's first step on shore;… with the first crotchet of the third bar he takes his second step—still with folded arms and bowed head; the third and fourth steps coincide with the notes of the eighth and tenth bars. Thus reads Wagner's stage direction for the Dutchman's entrance aria in Act I of *The Flying Dutchman*. This precise correspondence between music and bodily gestures (or what Nietzsche called a “mimomaniac” movement) certainly resembles what is known as “Mickey-Mousing” in film technique—a tight synchronization between music and the characters' bodily movement, as in animated cartoons (hence the term, “Mickey-Mousing”).

That Wagner's music dramas are among the earliest operas turned into film is another testimony to early filmmakers' fascination with the composer. In 1904, Edwin S. Porter directed *Parsifal*, a twenty-five minute silent screened in New York City. Other silent films associated with Wagner's work include Franz Porten's *Lohengrin* (1907), Albert Capellani's *Tristan et Yseult* (1909), and Mario Caserini's *Parsifal* (1912) and *Siegfried* (1912). In 1913, Carl Froelich directed a feature-length (about ninety minutes) silent film, *Richard Wagner*, in which the film's composer Giuseppe Becce played the title role. Froelich's film is known to be the first composer biopic.

Wagner's resonance has been stronger during the sound era. He is one of the most frequently quoted composers on the soundtracks of blockbuster titles, ranging from comedy (Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, 1940) and cartoon (*What's Opera, Doc*, 1957) to fantasy (John Boorman's *Excalibur*, 1981), horror (*Werner Herzog's Nosferatu the Vampyre*, 1979), and such war films as Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Coppola's indelible use of Wagner's “Ride of the Valkyries” on the soundtrack for the scene of the U. S. air raid in Vietnam was so powerful that this music was actually used during the U. S. aerial attack on Iraq on June 21, 2003. According to Reuters, “U. S. troops psyched up on a bizarre musical reprise from Vietnam war film *Apocalypse Now* before crashing into Iraqi homes to hunt gunmen on Saturday, … With Wagner's “Ride of the Valkyries” still ringing in their ears and the clatter of helicopters overhead, soldiers rammed vehicles into metal gates and hundreds of troops raided houses in the western city of Ramadi after sunrise as part of a drive to quell a spate of attacks on U. S. forces.”

Even when Wagner's music is not used, his inaudible presence looms large in such celebrated box-office hit as Peter Jackson's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, based on J. R. R. Tolkien's epic fantasy novel. In spite of Tolkien's adamant refusal of Wagner's influence on his work in declaring, “Both rings were round, and there the resemblance ceased,” Jackson's trilogy has made a significant contribution to the popularization of Wagnerian ambience in cinema for the general audience. On November 13, 2005, Carnegie Hall featured a “Double-Ring” concert, consisting of excerpts from Wagner's *Ring* cycle and Howard Shore's score for the film trilogy; and Alex Ross's *New Yorker* article, “The Ring and the Rings,” saluted the affinities between Tolkien's/Jackson's epic and Wagner's tetralogy. Also indicative of Wagner's kinship with cinema is Bayreuth's invitation of film directors to stage productions: for instance, Werner Herzog, who directed *Lohengrin* in the late 1980s, and Lars von Trier, although he declined his invitation in 2004. Patrice Chéreau, who staged the much-discussed, controversial centennial production of the *Ring* cycle, is also a film director, renowned for *Queen Margot*, the winner of the Jury Prize at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival, and *Son frère*, which earned him Best Director at the 2003 Berlin International Film Festival.

**Philharmonia's Wagner and Cinema Concert: Between Stage and Screen**

Bayreuth's attraction to film directors is an inevitable consequence, considering Wagner's cinematic imagination discussed above. Using film projection and techniques has a along history in the staging of Wagner. As early as in 1928, Franz Ludwig Hörth and Emil Pirchan used a film screen for the entry of the gods into Valhalla at the end of *Das Rheingold* in their Berlin production. One of the most recent landmarks is *The Tristan Project*, in which Bill Viola's video images are projected on a gigantic screen during the live performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The singers' acting on stage was minimized in the production in Los Angeles (2004 and 2007) and New York City (2007) to the extent that it was almost a concert performance. The production for the Paris Opera in 2005 was fully staged, directed by Peter Sellars; but in this production, too, the onstage action was extremely restrained and the stage setting was almost bare so that Viola's video images became the main visual content of the opera.

Maestro Mark Gibson's collaboration with film director Tony Palmer for CCM's Philhamonia concert is another exploration of the interplay between stage and screen. Opening with the instrumental introduction to “Brünnhilde's Awakening” from Act 3 of Siegfried, the music consists of excerpts from various operas by Wagner—*The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*. Maestro Gibson's music selection focuses on the theme of “redemption through love,” one of the most prominent themes in Wagner's oeuvre. For Wagner, love and death are often intertwined—death as the fulfillment of redemptive love. In his program notes to the premiere of *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner wrote: