

09-10 STADIUM LEGENDS

DAYTON
PHILHARMONIC
ENGAGE. ENJOY. EMERGE

FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 2010
PROGRAM
"EVOLUTION OF A REVOLUTIONARY"

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 9, 1st
Movement

WAGNER

Overture to Part I of
Goethe's *Faust* (1840)
Lohengrin, Act I Prelude
A Faust Overture (1855)



CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS

RICHARD WAGNER

WELCOME

Classical Connections programs usually focus on major masterpieces of the orchestral repertory or on important new works. This one's different. We'll be looking at a short, obscure composition: Richard Wagner's *Faust Overture*. But I think you'll be fascinated anyway!

I first heard of the *Faust Overture* as a Yale senior in Prof. Robert Bailey's class on the Romantic Era. Heard it, liked it, analyzed it, filed it away. Four years later, at the Manhattan School of Music, my Master's thesis advisor, Dr. Paul Eisler, pitched me an idea: a study of how Wagner crafted the *Faust Overture* from an earlier, unpublished version. Another Manhattan School faculty member, Dr. Joseph Braunstein, owned a photocopy of the original manuscript and was willing to let me come to his apartment and copy it by hand.

It was a grand plan: make a performance-ready edition of the old version; compare that to the later version; show how Wagner's approach to overtures changed by referencing his overtures from the intervening years; do a concert starting with the 1840 version of the *Faust Overture*, ending with the 1855 version, with the overtures to *Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman*, and *Lohengrin* in between.

Well... it never happened. No thesis and no concert. But I did all the work, including transcribing the 1840 score.

In 1993, I adapted that work into a Classical

Connections program for the Milwaukee Symphony. On January 8 you'll hear a new, updated, improved version of that program.

So yes, January's concert is me making up an incomplete from 30 years ago!

Neal Gittleman

Music Director, Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra





PORTRAIT
RICHARD WAGNER,
Faust,
- & -
**THE ROMANTIC
HERO**

In July 1839, hounded by creditors clamoring for his hide, Richard Wagner packed his belongings, his wife Minna, and his black labrador Robber onto a tramp steamer and vanished from Riga into the dark North Sea night. Following a harrowing journey at sea, the Wagners settled in the city where Wagner expected to find fame and fortune: Paris.

[That's the word-for-word opening of the first draft of my unfinished Masters thesis!]

Wagner's plan was a simple one: make contacts at the Paris Opera, arrange for a triumphant production of his still half-finished opera *Rienzi*, and rake in the francs. It didn't quite happen that way. Wagner made the contacts, but there was no way the Opéra de Paris would agree to produce an unfinished opera by an obnoxious, egotistical, unknown, small-town German composer.

But Paris wasn't a total waste of Wagner's time. He finished *Rienzi*, started *The Flying Dutchman* (perhaps inspired by that wild North Sea crossing), and rediscovered Beethoven.

In a sense, Beethoven had been Wagner's earliest teacher. Wagner learned his craft by copying and studying Beethoven scores. (There is, for example, a complete score of Beethoven's overture and incidental music to *Egmont*, copied in the young Wagner's hand.) But by the time Wagner set sail for Paris, he had left Beethoven behind. He had heard too many bad performances of Beethoven symphonies by second-rate German orchestras. He had been involved in "Young Germany", a radical movement that advocated doing away with old German traditions (including the tradition of capitalizing nouns). He had been excited by the revolutionary new music of the Frenchman Hector Berlioz. So he set his sights on Paris, following in the footsteps of the successful German émigré opera composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (born Jakob Liebmann Beer). Beethoven was the last thing on his mind...

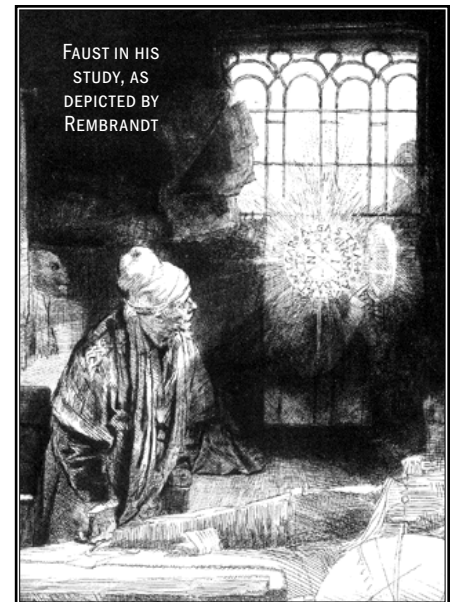
...until he attended a rehearsal of the Paris Conservatory orchestra under the direction of François Habeneck, and had his socks knocked off! Habeneck was rehearsing the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth. It was a revelation. Wagner had never heard an orchestra like this. It was much bigger than the provincial opera house orchestras Wagner knew. It played much better, with none of the shoddy musicianship Wagner was used to hearing. In one afternoon Wagner was swept up by a new understanding and a new appreciation of German music in general, and Beethoven in particular.

In the heat of his excitement, Wagner quickly wrote an overture based on the most German work of



GOETHE

all: Goethe's *Faust*. Goethe's title character personified the German romantic hero — a brilliant but troubled seeker of truth, living life to the fullest, grasping at every opportunity for enlightenment, experience, and romance.



The overture, depicting Faust alone in his study, is a dark, turbulent work in the key of D minor—the same key and the same mood as the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth. In taking inspiration from Goethe and Beethoven, Wagner turned his back on Parisian esthetics and cast his lot definitively with the Teutonic tradition. He was still in Paris. He was still out to succeed at the Opéra. But he would succeed as a German, not as a Parisian.

He didn't succeed at all, and in 1842 Wagner returned to Germany to take a conducting position in

WAGNER, LISZT, & THE *FAUST* OVERTURE: EXCERPTS FROM THEIR LETTERS

Dresden. It was in Dresden that Wagner conducted the premiere of the Overture to Part I of Goethe's *Faust* on July 22, 1844. (Habeneck's Conservatory orchestra did a reading of the piece in 1840, but no public performance took place.)

The overture was a modest success. Wagner played it several times in Dresden, and when Franz Liszt became the conductor in Weimar, he asked Wagner to send him the overture. Liszt became the work's champion, programming it numerous times at the Weimar theater.

In 1852, Liszt wrote to Wagner and had the audacity to point out what he saw as flaws in the piece, along with his suggestions for improvements. Wagner respected Liszt and needed his patronage, so — in a rare moment of humility — he took Liszt's critique seriously.

A fascinating correspondence ensued, resulting in two important works: Liszt's 1853 *Faust* Symphony and Wagner's revamped 1855 *Faust* Overture. Though neither composer ever gave the other credit, their letters show that Liszt got the idea for his *Faust* Symphony (three movements — one each for Faust, Gretchen, and Mephistopheles) from Wagner and that Wagner used Liszt's critique as a template for revising and improving his *Faust* Overture.

Through Liszt's offices, the revised *Faust* Overture was published by Breitkopf and Härtel and entered the orchestral repertory as an important minor piece by an important major composer. It was Wagner's last concert work for full orchestra. Ironically, the 1840 version had been his first.

Wagner to Liszt

7/30/1848: [I hear that] you want my overture to Goethe's *Faust*. As I know of no reason to withhold it from you except that it does not please me any longer, I send it to you...

5/29/1852: I must thank you for the news of the continued activity which you employ in the propagation of my works... I cannot be angry with this composition, although many detailed things in it would not now flow from my pen; especially the somewhat too plentiful brass...

9/12/1852: Be kind enough to send me...my *Faust* overture. I hope that, if you want it still, you have had a copy made. I have a mind to rewrite it a little and to publish it.... Perhaps I shall get a little money for it.

11/9/1852: ...you beautifully spotted the lie when I tried to make myself believe that I had written an "Overture to *Faust*." You have felt quite justly what is wanting: the woman is wanting. Perhaps you would at once understand my tone-poem if I called it *Faust in Solitude*. At that time I intended to write an entire *Faust* symphony; the first movement, that which is ready, was this "solitary *Faust*," longing, despairing, cursing. The "feminine" floats around him as an object of his longing, but not in its divine reality, and it is just this insufficient image of his longing which he destroys in his despair. The second movement was to introduce Gretchen, the woman. I had a theme for her, but it was only a theme. The whole remained unfinished. I wrote my *Flying Dutchman* instead... If now, from a last remnant of weakness and vanity, I hesitate to abandon this *Faust* work altogether, I shall certainly have to remodel it, but only as regards instrumental modulation. The theme which you desire I cannot introduce; this would naturally involve an entirely new composition, for which I have no inclination. If I publish it, I shall give it its proper title, *Faust in Solitude*, or *The Solitary Faust*, "a tone-poem for orchestra."

1/19/1855: It is splendid that you have finished *Faust*, and you may imagine that I am most anxious to see it.... It is an absurd coincidence that just at this time I have been taken with a desire to remodel my old *Faust* overture. I have made an entirely new score, have rewritten the instrumentation throughout, have made many changes, and have given more expansion and importance to the middle portion (second motive). I shall give it in a few days at a concert here under the title of *A Faust Overture*.

2/20/1855: Herewith, dear Franz, you receive my remodeled *Faust* overture, which will appear very insignificant to you by the side of your *Faust* symphony. To me the composition is interesting only on account of the time from which it dates; this reconstruction has again endeared it to me: and with regard to the latter, I am childish enough to ask you to compare it very carefully with the first version, because I should like you to take cognizance of the effect of my experience and of the more refined feeling I have gained. In my opinion, new versions of this kind show most distinctly the spirit in which one has learned to work and the coarsenesses which one has cast off. You will be better pleased with the middle part. I was, of course, unable to introduce a new motive, because that would have involved a remodeling of almost the whole work; all I was able to do was to develop the sentiment a little more broadly, in the form of a kind of enlarged cadence. Gretchen of course could not be introduced — only Faust himself... All this, however, is only the prelude to your *Faust* symphony, to which I look forward with infinite pleasure.

Liszt to Wagner

4/13/1852: Your *Faust* overture made a sensation, and went well.

10/7/1852: Your *Faust* overture you will receive by today's post. A copy of it exists here, and I shall probably give it again in the course of this winter. The work is quite worthy of you; but if you will allow me to make a remark, I must confess that I should like either a second middle part (at letter E or F) or else a quieter and more agreeably colored treatment of the present middle part... The brass is a little too massive there, and — forgive my opinion — the motive in F is not satisfactory; it lacks grace in a certain sense, and is a kind of hybrid thing, neither fish nor [fowl], which stands in no proper relation or contrast to what has gone before and what follows, and, in consequence, impedes the interest. If, instead of this, you introduced a soft, tender, melodious part, modulated à la Gretchen, I think I can assure you that your work would gain very much. Think this over, and do not be angry in case I have said something stupid.

(Several years transpire, with no mention of the overture in the correspondence. Then, in December, 1854, Liszt announces the completion of his *Faust* Symphony.)

1/25/1855: You were quite right in arranging a new score of your *Faust* overture. If you have succeeded in making the middle part a little more pliable, this work, significant as it was before, must have gained considerably.

3/12/1855: The changes you have made in the *Faust* overture are excellent, and the work has decidedly gained by them.

Oy Vey!

There's no good way to say it: Richard Wagner has a "Jewish Problem". While his music isn't actually banned in Israel, no one programs it except Daniel Barenboim and Zubin Mehta. Many Jewish music lovers — my mother, for instance — are deeply ambivalent about Wagner. And many non-Jews can't separate Wagner's music from his anti-Jewish writings.

Wagner was certainly an anti-Semite — as was nearly everyone of his era. What makes him particularly suspect is (a) he put it in writing; (b) Adolph Hitler read what Wagner wrote; (c) Wagner was Hitler's favorite composer (Beethoven was a close second). At issue is *Judaism in Music*, an essay published under a pen name in 1850, then reprinted under Wagner's own byline in 1867. The gist in one simple, ugly sentence (better that you not waste your time reading the actual essay): Although Jews had been emancipated from Europe's ghettos in the 1830s and 1840s, they were not truly part of European culture and the music of Jewish composers was artificial, insincere, and inferior to music written by non-Jews.

Which Jewish composers did Wagner attack? Felix Mendelssohn, Jacques Halévy, and Giacomo Meyerbeer. What was their crime? Success. Wagner envied their



FELIX MENDELSSOHN



JACQUES HALÉVY



GIACOMO MEYERBEER

success, their wealth, their prominence, their popularity. Wagner also blamed Meyerbeer for blocking his opera *Rienzi* from performance at the Paris Opera. In the 1867 reprint of the essay Wagner added Viennese music critic (and anti-Wagnerian) Eduard Hanslick and violinist (and anti-Wagnerian) Joseph Joachim to his Jewish "enemies list".

But Wagner's anti-Jewish sentiments were more practical than fundamental. He had no trouble with Jewish musicians who were helpful to him: conductor Hermann Levi, who led the premiere of *Parsifal*; pianist Carl Tausig, who made the official piano arrangements of many Wagner operas; Samuel Lehrs, who befriended Wagner during his Paris sojourn.

I love Wagner's music and love conducting it. But I also respect those who choose to avoid it. There are important lessons to be learned from *Judaism in Music*. You never know who will quote you. You never know what horrors your words will be called upon to justify. In the wrong hands, words can kill.

CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS PODCASTS AVAILABLE
daytonphilharmonic.com

RICHARD WAGNER *A Life & Times*

- 1813 -

May 22, Wagner is born in Leipzig to police actuary Carl Friedrich Wagner and Johanna Wagner. It is suspected, however, that actor and artist Ludwig Geyer was Wagner's real father.

- 1826 -

Begins music studies.

- 1828 -

Hears Beethoven's Seventh and Ninth symphonies for the first time and decides to become a composer.

- 1840 -

Composes Overture to Part I of Goethe's *Faust* in Paris.

- 1849 -

Flees to Zurich from Dresden, where he had participated in failed revolt against the Saxon government.

- 1851 -

Begins work on four-opera cycle *The Ring of the Niebelung*, completed 25 years later.

- 1855 -

Prodded by Franz Liszt, Wagner revises and publishes the *Faust* Overture.

- 1870 -

Marries Cosima von Bülow after a six-year affair and three children. Liszt is now Wagner's father-in-law.

- 1872 -

Begins construction of an opera house in Bayreuth specially designed to house his *Ring* cycle.

- 1876 -

First complete performance of the *Ring* takes place in Bayreuth.

- 1883 -

February 13, dies of a heart attack in Venice.

- 1813 -

War rages on both sides of the Atlantic. Mexico declares independence from Spain. Rossini's comic opera *The Italian Girl in Algiers* premieres in Venice. McGill University founded in Montreal.

- 1826 -

Lobachevsky develops non-Euclidean geometry.

- 1828 -

Noah Webster publishes the *American Dictionary of the English Language*.

- 1840 -

Nelson's Column erected in London's Trafalgar Square.

- 1849 -

Austria suppresses Hungarian rebellion. Charles Dickens writes *David Copperfield*. Minnesota becomes a U.S. territory.

- 1851 -

First edition of *New York Times* published. Isaac Singer invents the sewing machine.

- 1855 -

Walt Whitman writes *Leaves of Grass*. Birth of Sigmund Freud.

- 1870 -

John D. Rockefeller founds Standard Oil. Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

- 1872 -

Brooklyn Bridge opens, linking Brooklyn and Manhattan.

- 1876 -

Disputed U.S. presidential election between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden.

- 1883 -

Metropolitan Opera House opens in New York City.

