

THE DISSEMINATION OF THE 'GESAMTKUNSTWERK' AROUND 1900 – A SURVEY

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Abstract: The article explores the reception of Richard Wagner's work (1813-1883) and especially the concept of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' within the European context around 1900, in Germany and Austria as well as in France, Italy and Nordic Countries such as Sweden and Finland. It also discusses the relationships between Wagner and Brazil especially those established with D. Pedro II, as well as the Wagnerian reception within the Latin-American context.

Keywords: Music reception; Richard Wagner; 'Gesamtkunstwerk'; D. Pedro II; Brazil.

A disseminação do 'Gesamtkunstwerk' à volta de 1900 – um panorama.

Resumo: O artigo explora a recepção da obra de Richard Wagner (1813-1883) e especialmente do conceito do 'Gesamtkunstwerk' no contexto Europeu à volta de 1900, seja na Alemanha e Áustria como na França, Itália e nos Países Nórdicos Suécia e Finlândia. Considera ainda as relações entre Wagner e Brasil especialmente aquelas estabelecidas por e com D. Pedro II, e da recepção Wagneriana no contexto latino-americano.

Palavras-chave: Recepção musical; Richard Wagner; 'Gesamtkunstwerk'; D. Pedro II; Brazil.

The term 'Gesamtkunstwerk' is related to the name and work of Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Sometimes it is argued today that the concept of blending the arts itself was invented by Wagner and had been something new in the 19th century. I would like, however, to show in this text that this kind of argumentation is not entirely correct, because Wagner's works and aesthetics show a very specific, not to say idiosyncratic way to combine different types of media which has in to be considered in its terms as something new in the cultural history. Moreover, his concept of 'Gesamtkunstwerk' was adapted by the generation of composers and librettists which was to follow him. To outline this world-wide dissemination among musicians of the late 19th and early 20th century is the main aim of this article. Before that I will describe Wagner's concept shortly by presenting some of its main features. Finally, a survey about his relation to Brazil will be given together with some ideas on how to approach the early dissemination of Wagner's works in Brazil with a list of questions which could serve as a basis for a more detailed research project about this issue.

1. The term 'Gesamtkunstwerk' – its meaning and realisation in Wagner's theoretical texts and dramas

Wagner's concept of creating a new kind of artwork implied the combination of different arts. If his theoretical texts and his works are evaluated in their entirety, it becomes quite clear when he developed this idea: it was in the years of his employment at the Dresden court opera during the middle of the 1840s. At this time Wagner composed the first version of the *Tannhäuser* and the *Lohengrin*, conducted and staged his works in Dresden, Berlin and Hamburg and started to reflect about the necessity of a reform of the theatres and opera houses in Germany. The concept of 'Gesamtkunstwerk' becomes apparent in his Zurich treatises, which were written in the years between 1849 and 1851, and in the work to become the *Ring des Nibelungen* which in the first years of its ge-

nesis had the preliminary title *Siegfried's Tod*. The *Ring*, written from 1849 to 1874 and first performed in 1876, can be regarded as the main work of the artist Wagner, while his Zurich treatises *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, written in 1850, and *Oper und Drama*, written in 1850/51, are the most comprehensive texts of the theorist Wagner. We can only get a correct idea of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' if we take both sides, the theoretical as well as the practical one, into consideration.

Which are its main features?

1. The most important arts in the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' are of course music and drama. Wagner always wrote himself both the music and the text of his dramas.
2. At the same time he is, as a theorist, never aiming towards a written artwork, just on the contrary: according to his sensu-alistic aesthetics, a dramatic as well as a musical artwork only exist at the moment of their performance and in its reception through a listener and/or spectator.¹ Wagner regarded thus a score or a book containing a dramatic text not as a work - not even his own scores and dramatic texts, but the performed artwork only.
3. His blending of different arts does not include every art, even though he wrote in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* about all arts to join in order to produce the combined artwork. For instance the visual arts – such as painting, sculpture and architecture, should serve the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' as stage painting, stage sculpturing etc., i.e. as part of the dramatic presentation.
4. As he points out in his texts, he did not aim towards a simple addition of all arts to create a new and more powerful artwork. His concept of the fusion of different arts in the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' is hierarchical; they are thus definitely as

1 Wagner, vol. III, p. 149 – 160.

not having equal rights. The first and dominating art is the drama, i.e. in Wagner's case not the text but the realisation of the drama on stage; this explains why his function during the rehearsals of his works - at least in the second half of his life, consisted more of a stage director than that of a conductor. The scenic action determines everything in the drama: the text to be sung, the things we see on the stage including the delivery of the actors as well as the scenic effects – and also the music. The music in this kind of Wagnerian artwork is always dependent on the action and cannot be compared in an adequate manner with an orchestral piece like a symphony or another kind of 'absolute' music. This seems striking due to the fact that Wagner today – against his own will – is regarded more as a composer than as a dramatist.

5. The music has a serving function by explaining, commenting and sometimes even accurately accompanying scenic processes such as persons moving or making gestures or as the changing of the light and the scene. This rhythmic coordination of scene and orchestral music shows a concept very close to film, or closer to it than any other 19th century concept.
6. Additionally Wagner is in his artwork integrating the declamation of the theatre of his time into the music. His vocal lines are, as his contemporaries easily discovered, often constructed after the principles of artificial theatrical speech and for this reason his compositions show sometimes a certain similarity with the genre of the melodrama. These passages were baptised 'Sprechgesang' at his time and can be regarded as the pendant of the speech of the actor with background music in nowadays movies.

These were the main features of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' which were to be adapted – or not – by the dramatic composers after Wagner.

From the very beginning the reception of his works and texts was highly polarized, and for a young composer in the late 19th century it was really impossible to make a career without taking a decisive position towards the question of being pro- or contra- Wagner. Or in our context: pro- or contra- his artistic concept of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. Within the next pages the dramatic work of some composers who were – at least temporarily – prominent Wagnerians shall be examined to see whether and how the idea of a fully dramatic determined musical 'Gesamtkunstwerk' did disseminate in Europe in the years after Wagner's final breakthrough in Germany, which took place in the early 1870s. First of all we will deal with some German and Austrian composers, then we will take a look on the countries in the neighbourhood of Germany and will end by taking a short glance on the Wagnerian reception overseas.

2. Wagner reception in 19th century Germany and Austria

Wagner had three major breakthroughs in his home country: first, the world première of his *Rienzi* in 1842 brought him local fame in Saxony and consequently the position as master of the Royal court chapel in Dresden. Second, the world première of *Lohengrin* in Weimar under Franz Liszt, which took place in 1850, made him a nation-wide prominent person who in those days was living in his Swiss exile as a political refugee. Third, he did manage to establish his dramas as works of national relevance at the time right before and after the French-German war in 1870/71, and got at that time the reputation of a national artist, the embodiment of the spirit of the 'Gründerzeit', i.e. the years of fast raising nationalism and prosperity in Germany. His popularity was growing constantly during the 1870s and the two decades after his death, and reached its peak around 1900. At that time his work dominated the repertoire in all larger cities of Germany and Austria. After World War I it became slightly less present. Giacomo Puccini's (1858–1924) operas were to be the most often performed, but Wagner's popularity remained

still on a very high level throughout all social classes. This last fact is an important differential to the *wagnérisme* in France where his work became more popular mainly among some artists and aristocratic circles and not so much in the middle and lower classes.

Between 1890 and 1920 there were mainly three dramatic composers in Germany and Austria which were, and are still considered to be, the most influential post-Wagner composers to pursue his 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. Each of them, however, did adapt Wagner's model in an individual manner.

Richard Strauss (1864–1949) composed several works for the stage, their lion's share written after 1900. Strauss often underlined how important Wagner's model was to him by simultaneously pointing out the differences to his own pieces. Strauss was well acquainted with Wagner's compositional process since Cosima, Wagner's widow, allowed him to study her husband's musical sketches preserved in Bayreuth. Strauss came then to the conclusion that Wagner's way to compose and perform a dramatic work did differ in many respects from his own. On one hand, states Strauss, the scene was of much more importance for his predecessor than for him. On the other hand, he did record, the solo singers of his operas had to have different abilities than the typical Wagner-singers. To say it shortly: Strauss's musical declamation is more 'musical', more like that of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Götterdämmerung* than that of e.g. *Das Rheingold*. In his first opera *Guntram*, written between 1887 and 1892, he tried to imitate Wagner's process of accurately creating a work by writing his own libretto. After studying the sketches, however, he decided to work with professional dramatists like Hugo von Hofmannsthal and then started to write his other 13 operas, composed between 1900 and 1941. They constitute indeed the main part of his compositional activity and there is no doubt that Strauss always regarded himself as a music-dramatist. Beside that, four incidental music pieces were written between 1887 and 1904

and served maybe as some kind of music-dramatic studies. Compared with Wagner, Strauss had mostly the sense of a musician than of a dramatist. As a composer and conductor he was very famous in his time and surely one of the most skilful musicians at the turn of the century, but he never worked as a stage director and obviously lacked Wagner's histrionic ability.

Hans Pfitzner (1869–1949) defined himself as a music-dramatist and did work as a composer, conductor and stage director, precisely like Wagner. During his engagement at the Straßburg theatre he did found an opera school which was to cooperate with the town opera. His rehearsal practice at the Straßburg theatre was very similar to that of Wagner: Pfitzner sang and acted the roles of the singers to show how the vocal and physical delivery should be done. From his pen derive five operas, composed between 1891 and 1931, and three incidental music pieces to dramas of Heinrich von Kleist and Henrik Ibsen, composed between 1889 and 1906. He wrote the libretto of his most famous opera, *Palestrina*, which he did set to music between 1909 and 1911. His theoretical texts reveal some slightly more musically immanent aesthetics than that of Wagner. Pfitzner's vocal lines – in addition to his dramatic works he was also a prolific Lied-composer – confirm this impression. And even though he had the reputation of an orthodox Wagnerian – maybe because of his fierce attacks against the new music – his theoretical texts show here and there a critical distance to the work of his predecessor; e.g. some passages in Pfitzner's book *Werk und Wiedergabe* (1929) present dramatic and/or musical weaknesses of single episodes in Wagner's dramas.

The well-known critic Paul Bekker considered Franz Schreker (1878–1934) justly "the first talent after Wagner, which in its kind is entirely related to him, the same phenomenon"² This statement may rely on a number of facts: a) Schreker wrote his libretti normally himself – his

2 Hailey, p. 288.

first opera, *Flammen*, being the only exception; b) His musical declamation is very close to the 'Sprechgesang', closer than that of any other of his contemporaries; c) The scene is absolutely dominant in his compositional output. Most of his works are dramatic works, e.g. his nine operas composed between 1901 and 1932. After his early works, which were mostly pieces for choir and Lieder written in a Brahms-like manner, he started to focus on dramatic music. Also a large part of his orchestral compositions is related to the drama. In addition, his musical temperament shows the same febrile characteristics as those found in the Bayreuth master. After becoming the director of the Berliner Hochschule für Musik in 1920, where he had many famous pupils like Berthold Goldschmidt, Alois Hába and Ernst Křenek, he did engage himself in film music (*Vier Skizzen für den Film*) becoming artistic director of the Comedia-Tonfilm GmbH in 1932.

3. The West: French *wagnérisme*

Even though the first French performance of the *Tannhäuser*, which had its infamous première in Paris 1861, was one of the most remarkable scandals in the history of opera, it was the starting point for a cultural phenomenon, the so-called French *wagnérisme*, which was a very broad and extensive movement and did not remain only in the field of music and drama.

Among the most prominent musicians of that era was Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921). He wrote fourteen operas, knew Wagner personally since 1860 when he took part in the numerous rehearsals for the French *Tannhäuser*-première, and even played music together. His *Harmonie et mélodie* contains his memoirs on the world première of the *Ring*-cycle in 1876. Saint-Saëns was one of the first French composers to study Wagner's scores before 1870, even though he later on became more skeptical about these works and their reception, especially within

the context of French *wagnérisme*. He also tried to preserve French opera traditions in his own works and was thus very careful in taking over some of Wagner's musical achievements. Especially the number-structure of opera, despised by Wagner, is still present in a work like *Samson et Delilah*, and within it, numbers in traditional forms, e.g. the da capo aria which can easily be distinguished.

Another French opera composer – who dealt with a lot of music-dramatic projects but finished only one – was Claude Debussy (1862–1918). His relation to Wagner is quite ambivalent: first of all Wagner represented Germany, which became a problem for the young composers after 1871, the year of the French defeat against the German troops. Generally, his plots were seen as old-fashioned by the young composers of the time. Debussy described for instance *Parsifal* as a disgusting drama, but containing without doubt the most beautiful music: “One of the most beautiful sound-monuments which have been erected for the eternal fame of the music.”³ Maybe this point of view is representative of the attitude of most of the composers on the early 20th century because many did not appreciate the typical Wagnerian dramatic style which included e.g. loud, long and powerful ‘duets’ like the one in the final act of *Siegfried*, even to Wagnerians like Richard Strauss and Hugo Alfvén. But the music was regarded as to contain the essentials of modern orchestration, as can be seen in Strauss's *Instrumentationslehre*. The French *wagnérisme* is still to be evaluated by (music-) historical research, even though many relevant details have been so far collected.⁴ In this context, however, these few examples may suffice.

3 Debussy, p. 80.

4 A short survey about the compositional wagnérisme is given in: Döhning, p. 282 – 293.

4. The South: The 'Gesamtkunstwerk' entering operas' homeland

It is well known that Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) regarded Wagner's music not relevant to his own. Especially the very rich and complex orchestral accompaniment was in his eyes not suited for an Italian opera. However, in his last operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, the orchestra is treated in a manner which leads to the conclusion that he abandoned his resentments to Wagner at the end of his life. Furthermore, the aesthetics of the late Verdi is very similar to that of the German master and a closer look onto this field, which has not been done so far, would be indeed very fruitful.

The first performance of one of Wagner's operas, the *Lohengrin*, in Bologna 1872 was the starting point for the Wagner-reception in Italy. The generation of Italian composers after Verdi grew up in a Wagnerian environment and it is hardly surprising that also in Italy composers started to rely on his works. The best known opera composer around the turn of the century, Giacomo Puccini, was one of them. An ardent admirer of the German master from his youth on – in his *Manon Lescaut* Wagner's influence becomes most evident – he wrote twelve operas altogether and adapted the thematic organisation as well as the subtle kind of instrumentation in the orchestral part of his works. The musical declamation shows many characteristics typical of Puccini's personal style that differs widely from Wagner. Beside that Puccini was blending the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' with elements of the Italian *Verismo*, and was even present at the rehearsals of the first performances of his operas to control the scenic presentation – like Wagner – creating thus a sometimes nearly filmic artwork.

The same applies to Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) who in the first three of his eight operas was also influenced by the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' as well as by the Italian *verismo*. Compared with Puccini the orchestra is more on the focus of Respighi's operas than the human voice,

but at the same time his orchestration and musical declamation is also more colourful, and his operatic production shows more stylistic changes than Wagner.

5. The East: National romanticism in Wagner's shadow

The Bohemian composers of the late 19th century intended to create a national opera and it is clear that the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' had a strong impact on them. Both leading composers of the time were influenced by it. Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884) knew Wagner's works thoroughly, regarded the musical techniques used in them as paradigmatic for progressive composers and completed himself eight operas; a ninth one remained unfinished. The first of them, *Braniboři v Čechách* (The Brandenburgers in Bohemia), confronted him with the problem of the correct musical declamation for the Czech language. This problem remained one even during the composition of his next and by far most successful opera, *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride). In its first version he used spoken dialogues as in the traditional 'Singspiel' or the Romantic Opera which he replaced by recitatives later, exactly the same procedure used in his opera *Dvě vdovy* (The Two Widows). While *Prodaná nevěsta* became a lasting success his other operas are nearly forgotten even though they would deserve a closer look. Smetana had plans to found an opera school whose task would have been not only the musical education but also the training of its dramatic delivery, precisely as Wagner postulated in his texts, and even other documents like his letter to Adolf Čech from January 1881, which reveals that he was well acquainted with Wagner's remarks about the physical delivery of opera roles.

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) was also an admirer of Wagner, both at the beginning and at the end of his compositional career, and composed eleven operas altogether. The first of them, *Alfred*, was written

in German and shows, like its successor *Král a uhlíř* (The King and the Charburner)⁵ the typical Wagnerian 'Sprechgesang'. But his Czech operas also show strong influences from this specific musical declamation. Generally they don't have the large dimensions of Wagner's and are often written in the traditional musical forms, for instance, in the Lied-form. His most popular opera, *Rusalka*, with the famous song to the moon, is a good example. And even if his orchestration technique is surely one of the most dexterous of his time, it is consciously not as complex as Wagner's with regard to the thematic organisation which was for his taste – like for that of his younger contemporary Jean Sibelius – too much calculated and constructed.

6. The North: Adapting and developing

Also most of the Northern composers in the late 19th century dealt with the concept of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' and can – at least periodically – be regarded as Wagnerians. Wagner's poems and theoretical texts were accessible to them in the German original, for in those days in Sweden German was the first foreign language to be learned, as in Finland aside from Russian, the second.⁶ The Northern operatic infrastructure started to develop in Stockholm and Helsinki, the only opera houses in the North beside Copenhagen at that time. It was only at the end of the 19th century that Wagner's works became performed more or less regularly, but had a lasting impact on musical life there. In the first half of the 20th century Wagner was the most often performed music dramatist in Finland after the Finnish première of his *Tannhäuser* in 1904, the first work of his oeuvre to be performed scenically there. In Sweden *Rienzi* was the first of Wagner's works staged. The reaction of the Stockholm audience was quite enthusiastic, but this didn't help the work to make its way in Sweden. It needed some more 10 years until the Swedish première of *Lohengrin* caused Wagner's breakthrough in the North. Since

5 This appeals for the first composition. Dvořák composed the opera twice.

6 Finland was an autonomous part of Russia until it became independent in 1917.

then a long and honourable tradition of singing and playing Wagner has been created.

a) Sweden

Andreas Hallén (1846–1925) studied and worked many years in Germany. He conducted Wagner's operas and is regarded as the first Swedish composer to follow his model; because of that he was called 'the Swedish Wagner' of his contemporaries. He was part of the outer periphery of Wagner's Bayreuth circle and became one of his admirers in 1878. As a singing teacher his compositional focus dwell on the vocal lines and constitutes the most original part of his music; the orchestra however sounds pretty much like a potpourri of passages mostly taken from *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Ring* and *Tristan* and even other operas. Hallén did also write many reviews, whose evaluation is ongoing. A large part of the correspondence with Hans Herrig, the German librettist of Hallén's first opera *Harald der Wiking* (Harald the Viking), has been discovered recently and seems to contain information about his exact relationship to Wagner's work.⁷ This opera had its world première under Franz Liszt in Leipzig in 1881 and Hallén wrote it on a German text; the Swedish version had its première three years later in Stockholm and was thus the first through-composed Swedish opera in Wagner's style. It was performed 15 times till 1912; Hallén did not manage to establish it in his home country and not even in Germany as his work is widely forgotten today. Hallén has composed two more operas, one scenic melodrama and six incidental music works.

Wilhelm Peterson-Berger (1867–1942) was not only a composer and well known critic of music but worked as stage director and translator of Wagner's texts into Swedish. He did write all libretti for his five operas (composed 1903–27). The most famous of his operas beca-

7 There are according to my preliminary cataloguing 55 letters and fragments plus 11 postcards written in German to Herrig which are part of a private collection. They will donated to the Statens Musikbibliotek in Stockholm in September 2009.

me *Arnljot*, which was after its world première in 1910 part of the Stockholm repertoire until the 1950s. He tried to install a festival tradition in Frösö in North Sweden with annual performances of *Arnljot* after the Bayreuth model, but in vain. Beside that Peterson-Berger was mainly a Lied-composer. His operas are musically simpler than Wagner's: they consist of a periodic and mostly vocal-line focused music. Numbers can be distinguished and the *Leitmotivtechnik*, which he uses, is much more loosely done than in Wagner's works. Peterson-Berger did defend these differences as rooted in the Nordic mentality which seeks for clarity of form and content. Wagner was one of the main topics of the critic Peterson-Berger. His most voluminous text is *Richard Wagner som kulturföreteelse* (Richard Wagner as a Cultural Phenomenon) and was published in 1913. Here as in his later works, a combination of admiration and distance is to be found in his attitude towards Wagner. On the one hand, his works are those of a genius. On the other hand, however, they are too "German" – i.e. too ponderous and extroverted – to become an example for a Swedish (or Nordic) national opera. According to Peterson-Berger the Nordic mentality strives for simplicity and clarity of form and a more civilized, introverted kind of expression. Furthermore he did manifest a lack of folk music in the work of the German national composer. Not only in this respect we can presume that Peterson-Berger tried to fulfil his pretensions in his own musical-dramatic works. Indeed, his music has anti-romantic features, despite the fact that he is widely regarded as the representative of the Swedish national romantic *par excellence*. His music is lacking the hypnotic, overwhelming effect of Wagner's as can be seen especially at the finales of his works. As documentation of contemporary Wagner reception, Peterson-Berger's are texts of high value. Already in his early texts he does state a popularisation of Wagner which led to a concentration on the music and a neglect of the scenic prescriptions – Pfitzner also describes the same process in Germany and Austria after 1900 – and Peterson-Berger underlines that such an attitude of reception would

miss its (and of course Wagner's) target entirely. His time as a stage director at the Royal Opera in the years between 1908 and 1910, an employment he got because of his expertise in Wagner's operas, may have enforced this interpretation as also happened with Pfitzner after his Straßburg engagement.

Like Jean Sibelius, Hugo Alfvén (1872–1960) dealt almost during his entire artistic active life with the idea to write an opera or musical drama but never managed to do so. His music shows not only a strong impact of Wagner's but also of Richard Strauss's music, even though Alfvén stated in his autobiography that he regarded Wagner by far as the most advanced and skilled composer of them both. His favourite works were *Meistersinger* and *Götterdämmerung*. Both works belong to the more musically immanent written dramas of Wagner's oeuvre. It can be presumed that an Alfvén opera would have sounded like Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*. He composed one ballet pantomime *Bergakungen* (The Mountains King), one incidental music *Vi (We)* and one ballett *Den förlo-rade sonen* (The Prodigal Son). Like in his symphonies and rhapsodies for orchestra, folk music served as a basis for his film music to *Synnöve Sol-bakken* (composed in 1934). Alfvén also composed music for other two films, namely to *Mans kvinna* (Woman of the man, 1944) and *Singoalla* (1949), which belong to his late works. Often did Alfvén recycle his music by e.g. quoting his *Midsommarvaka*, *Bergakungen* and *5th Symphony* etc. sometimes even the same piece in several other different works. He did enjoy the composition of film music since the film scenes forced him to compose pieces to an exact length, and thus it is possible that the freedom to compose a dramatic text was too large for him. Alfvén is together with Schreker one of the composers which took the new film medium seriously. It is also possible that it was due to his extraordinary talent as a painter, shown in his watercolours and – as one may state – in his sometimes very picturesque music.

b) Finland

Fredrik Pacius (1809–1891), the “father of Finnish music”, was of German origin and moved to Helsinki in 1835. He wrote three operas: The first, *Kung Karls jakt* (The Hunt of King Charles), composed in 1850/51, shows strong influences from Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, the operas of (his teacher) Louis Spohr, Heinrich Marschner, Carl Maria von Weber and even Giacomo Meyerbeer. As his second opera *Prinsessan av Cypern*, composed in 1860, it was composed by numbers but not from the beginning to the end in the manner Wagner wrote his first drafts. The world première of *Kung Karls jakt* in 1852 is regarded as the hour of birth of a genuine Finnish music. Only in 1857 does Pacius see for the first time a Wagner opera on stage - *Tannhäuser*, in Leipzig and Hamburg – but really dislikes it. A maybe astounding fact is that he, at first, in his old days, became an admirer of Wagner, precisely like his teacher Spohr.⁸ Not only until 1869/70 did Pacius dwell in Germany again and showed this time a more positive attitude towards *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. For his third and last opera he chose a German text and subject, *Die Loreley* after Emanuel Geibel. It is not known when he actually started to write the music for it. Maybe it was already in 1862, but only as late as 1886 was the score finished. The music is described as much more coherent than in his other operas which is definitively a result of Wagner’s influence. The opera was only performed several times in 1887, but had no lasting consequences in the development of Finnish music.

Martin Wegelius (1846–1906), pupil of Carl Reinecke and Joseph Rheinberger, was a conductor, composer and as a teacher of composition an absolutely central figure in Finland. He founded the first institute for music in 1882, which became today’s Sibelius Academy, and among his better known pupils were Erkki Melartin and Jean Sibelius. Wegelius was a full-blooded Wagnerian as his texts about music prove. In the 1890s he

8 Spohr wrote for the first time a libretto himself after having rehearsed the *Holländer*. This opera had the title *Die Kreuzfahrer* (The Crusaders) and was composed 1843/44 when he was as old as 69 years.

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did state that one could start to write the history of Finnish music now – if there were one, which must have had an echo on his pupils' ears. He wrote three incidental music works in the years between 1868 and 1898.

Erkki Melartin (1875–1937) was, like Sibelius, a student of Wegelius in Helsinki and Robert Fuchs in Vienna. Melartin became a composer and conductor as well as a teacher at the music institute in Helsinki. He wrote one opera in Finnish, *Aino*, which was composed in 1907/08 and had its world première in 1909, four incidental music works and a ballet. His opera was successfully performed several times in Finland and have been described from the very beginning as a work in the true Wagnerian spirit. Maybe he is the one of the Finnish composers which shows most similarities with Wagner. These similarities can only occur within certain limitations, which becomes clear when one takes the differences between the spoken language and the musical declamation of Finnish and German languages into consideration. *Aino* is a Kalevalaic mystery play and Jalmari Finne's libretto is thus not really dramatic. The action of this piece is more or less abstract and the libretto seems to be more that one of an oratorio than that of an opera.

Jean Sibelius (1856–1967) was not only a famous symphonist and composer of symphonic poems but also a dramatist, even though this part of his work is not as often presented to the public as it deserves. He wrote one opera, the half-hour–lasting one act opera *Neiti tornissa/ Jungfrun i tornet* (The Maiden in the Tower), which was not regarded as a qualified contribution to the genre or even to the composer's overall work. It has only been performed very few times. Nonetheless Sibelius was definitely a composer with dramatic ambitions. He composed one ballet, 11 incidental music works and 7 works for tableaux vivants. His best known piece of all, the *Valse triste*, was originally part of the incidental music for the drama *Kuolema* written by his brother in law Arvid Järnefelt, and his music to Shakespeare's *Tempest* became quite well known as his last finished work for orchestra. Sibelius dealt intensively

with Wagner's works within a short period. It was during the time of his most ambitious operatic project, *Veneen luominen/Båtens skapelse* (The Creation of the Boat), a work in three acts after the Kalevala. The two main roles would have been that of "Kuutar" and "Väinämöinen" which would presumably have been written for a soprano and a baritone; this is likely because Sibelius also used this combination in his unfortunately only fragmentary *Cantata for the promotion ceremony* (1897) with the "Väinämöinen" and the "Kalevatar". Beside the third movement of his *Kullervo* (1892), the solo parts in his *Cantata for the promotional ceremony* (May 1894) could be regarded as some sort of operatic *études*. In 1894 Sibelius starts to systematically study Wagner's scores and theoretical texts and went to Bayreuth and Munich to attend performances of these works staged by Wagner himself.⁹ At the time, he did follow the advice of his teacher Wegelius to travel by boat down the Rhine to Bayreuth – like "Siegfried" – and took a ship from Hamburg to Mainz. What exactly happened in this summer is not entirely clear. Letters to his later wife Aino reveal that Sibelius was deeply moved by the *Parsifal* in Bayreuth and the *Tristan* in Munich. At the same time he became skeptical about some elements from Wagner's artwork, as, for instance, the too much reflected and constructed orchestral part. Sibelius's own operatic project came to nothing in the very end, and there are many hints that he underwent a compositional crisis after his stay in Germany.¹⁰ As an old man he did state that he never became an enemy of Wagner's music, even though this was maintained by certain contemporaries.¹¹ It seems likely that Sibelius became aware in 1894 that Wagner's artwork implied more than music aiming towards a combined scenic-musical effect, and that he did not have the dramatic ability of the Bayreuth master. Thus Wagner's conception had an obviously quite negative consequence on Finland's national composer.

9 *Tristan* was shown in Munich in the original setting of 1865, *Parsifal* in the setting of the 1882 Bayreuth world première.

10 Tawaststjerna, p. 153 – 161.

11 Presumably it is Bengt von Törne's fault, that this rumour came into existence.

7. Summary

Within the last years of his life Wagner witnessed his works performed and appreciated everywhere in Germany and later abroad. They soon conquered the countries around Germany and were finally played in all parts of Europe. This fact was quite surprising for him for he never expected his *Tristan* to become a favourite piece of the audiences because of its complex music, abstract action and philosophic text. Furthermore, after the Paris *Tannhäuser* disaster, he did not expect that his dramas could be translated in a manner to be convincing for a non-German audience. It is likely that during the rehearsals for the Paris performance he discovered that his vocal lines were not easily and correctly translated because of their recitation-like structure, and there are some remarks which give a hint in this direction. Finally, in his late years, Wagner faced the fact that a new generation of composers proclaimed to follow his example – and strikingly enough he felt that he was anything but lucky about this.¹² Wagner's skeptical comment reveals that he suspected his followers to reduce him to a composer – which in his view he was not to be regarded exclusively, and to neglect the importance of the stage whether in his or in their own works. His negative attitude was possibly due to the fact that – as seen in this short survey with the possible exception of Franz Schreker – none of the composers followed his 'Gesamtkunstwerk' strictly but all of them returned more or less to the traditional opera and a rather conventional musical idiom. His 'Sprechgesang' was hardly used outside Germany and even there it was not imitated or continued consequently. Very often the large arches of his 'infinite melody' were substituted by simpler and smaller units which are easier to grasp by the listener. His characteristic aesthetics, to which the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' was central, was however well known among the musicians of the late 19th century. Yet, the calculated reduction of complexity of his music as well as of his aesthetics becomes the normal procedure in the compositional

12 Entry 14th April 1873 in: Gregor-Dellin, vol. I, S. 669.

reception of his music. Nonetheless his 'Gesamtkunstwerk', which was a combination of different dramatic genres like opera, incidental music, melodrama and theatre, had a strong impact on exactly these dramatic forms in the time around 1900. Furthermore, it was received in many different ways as it could, for instance, have an entirely negative effect on composers such as Sibelius and Alfvén because of Wagner's specific and sophisticated use of the combination of music and scene. It could also be used as a model for operas like Puccini, Respighi and Strauss and as a model for other scenic and even film related music. It could still serve as a challenge as well as an example of an exaggeration or excess in using the proposed combination of different media. None of the composers presented was entirely uncritical towards the heritage of the Bayreuth master. There was no global Wagnerism, but every nation adapted the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' depending on its social structure as well as on its dramatic and musical traditions.

8. Desiderata: the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' overseas

Not only in Europe was the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' thriving but also in America. In the 1890s the Metropolitan Opera in New York became an important centre of Wagner-performances by inviting famous singers and conductors from Europe, having Wagner also written music for the US: the *Großer Festmarsch zur Eröffnung der hundertjährigen Gedenkfeier der Unabhängigkeitserklärung der Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika* [Grande marcha festiva para a abertura da celebração comemorativa dos cem anos da declaração de independência dos Estados Unidos de América Norte] (WV 110) in 1876.

However, two decades earlier, another part of the New World did attract his attention: Brazil. Beside India, Brazil was one of the exotic countries Wagner wanted to visit, even if he never managed to do so.¹³ Moreover, in the very beginning of its genesis, *Tristan und Isolde* was in-

¹³ Entry 6th August 1879 in: Gregor-Dellin, vol. II, S. 394.

deed planned to be first performed at the opera of Rio de Janeiro, and the score supposed to be published with a dedication to Dom Pedro II. Wagner writes about his Brazilian connection in 1871.¹⁴ There is furthermore one contemporary document from Wagner's hand proving this fact. In a letter to Franz Liszt he seriously wrote on 28th June 1857 about the possibility to compose *Tristan* in German and to perform it in Rio in Italian.

It is a fact that shortly after this letter he actually started to write the first drafts and sketches for his *opus metaphysicum* in August 1857. In his autobiography *Mein Leben*, which was written some 20 years later, Wagner talks more ironically about these Brazilian plans but gives at the same time more detailed accounts about the way in which he came into contact with the emperor and confesses that he did believe in this project until the first act was finished, which happened in April 1858. Thus, without any exaggeration, it can be stated that the offer of the Brazilian emperor served as a stimulus for the genesis of Wagner's most complex work.

And not only *Tristan*, but even the *Ring* had caught the interest of Dom Pedro II as a letter from Wagner to Franz Liszt, written the 8th May 1857, demonstrates. At this time only the first two parts of the tetralogy were finished. Even though these plans did not go through, Dom Pedro II had obviously been an ardent Wagnerian. He visited the first Bayreuth festival in 1876, attended the Rheingold première, visited Wagner at his home thereafter, and actively supported the first Bayreuth festivals by becoming a member of the *Bayreuther Patronatsverein*. It seems thus as if the Brazilian Wagner-reception, which has started quite early on, began under similar circumstances as in France: Wagner's works were regarded as the most advanced and subtle of the time, and as a precious object well suited for the aristocratic need of representation.

14 *Epilogischer Bericht über die Umstände und Schicksale, welche die Ausführung des Bühnenfestspiels 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' bis zur Veröffentlichung der Dichtung desselben begleiteten* (in: Wagner vol. VI, p. 268 – 269).

At this point, if one were to outline the relations between Brazil and Wagner from at least the 19th century, the history of a Wagner-reception begun with an emperor continues until our days with Christoph Schlingensief's highly avant-garde staging of *Der fliegende Holländer* at the opera house in Manaus in 2007, alongside his Bayreuth *Parsifal* from 2004, his two Wagner-productions. But that's another story. In the same manner as in the Northern part of Europe, Brazil could be regarded as a country where musicians in the second half of the 19th century started to adapt the central European traditions and to create simultaneously some kind of national art music. This happened exactly at the time of the breakthrough and world-wide dissemination of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. From an European perspective, Brazil was a peripheral country like Finland, maybe a 'tabula rasa' in some cultural aspects, but – to postulate a preliminary thesis – with a social structure which differed in many ways from the European one and could thus have had generated a specific reception of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'.

If such a history should be written it could rely on some facts and methods presented in the former part of the text concerning its European reception. Leading questions in such a project would be: When did the first Brazilian performances of Wagner's work took place? How did the audience and the critics react? Are there reports which describe his works as written for the upper class like in Europe after 1860? Which were the points to measure and judge the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'? Did the traditional opera serve as such a point of reference? How did composers and aestheticians in Brazil react? Were Wagner's essays available for them? Did his dramas serve as a model for one or more generations of dramatists in South America as well? And if so, how did they modify his work in the manner that it occurred everywhere outside Germany and Austria? Did they try to imitate his orchestral treatment, his dramatic plots, his – and in this text not further evaluated – 'Leitmotivtechnik' or even maybe his musical declamation? Were they aware about the special efforts and construction of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'? Are there maybe parallels to the

European Wagner-reception among the composers as outlined in the former part of this text? Some important questions are still not answered even in the case of European composers. But the spectrum of the reception of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk', which is given in this short survey for Europe, shows certain patterns of reaction. Maybe the criteria used in this text could be also useful for a writing of the reception history of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' within the Latin American context. It would surely be an essential part of the history of dramatic music in general.

Stockholm, 10th August 2009, Dr. phil. Martin Knust M.A.

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