

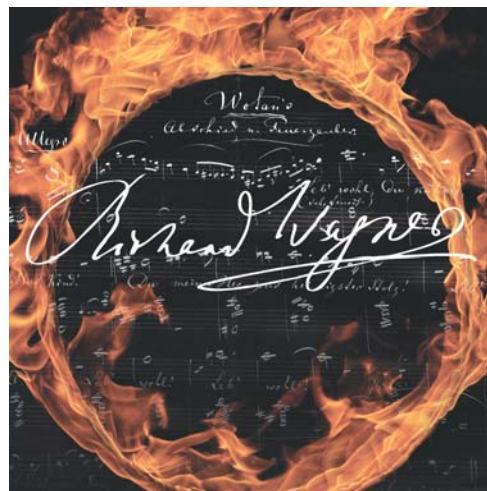
WAGNER'S SPECTACULAR *RING* AND ITS LEGENDARY PREMIERES IN BAYREUTH AND NEW YORK ARE EXPLORED IN A NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

Wagner's *Ring*: Forging an Epic
January 29 through April 17, 2016

Press Preview: Thursday, January 28, 10-11:30 AM
RSVP: media@themorgan.org

New York, NY, December 15, 2015 — In 1848 Richard Wagner (1813–1883) began work on what eventually would become his monumental cycle of four music dramas, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung). It would be twenty-six years before his masterpiece was fully completed in November 1874.

Now, in a new exhibition opening January 29, 2016, the Morgan Library & Museum explores the challenging creation of Wagner's epic, and the staging of its 1876 premiere in Bayreuth and its 1889 American debut at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The exhibition includes rare music manuscripts, letters, books, costumes and stage designs, photographs, and historical artifacts. A number of the items are on loan from the Richard Wagner Museum in Bayreuth and have never before been on public display. Additional material comes from the Morgan's music holdings, the Metropolitan Opera Archives, Columbia University, and from several private collections. *Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic* is on view through April 17.



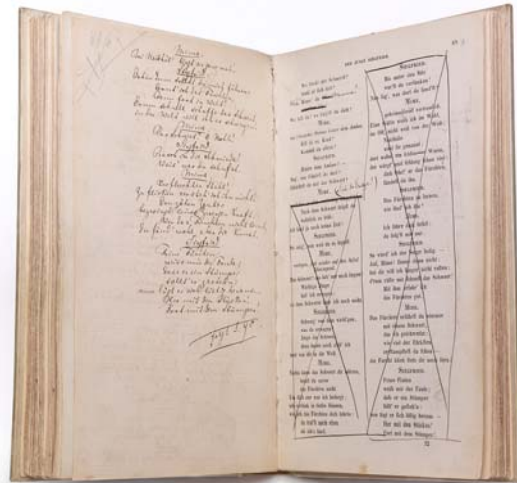
“To bring the grand spectacle of the *Ring* to the public stage, Richard Wagner labored for decades on the text and musical score, and spent years working to see it premiered in a theater built to his exacting specifications,” said Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “*Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic* dramatically brings to light the twists and turns of this

engrossing narrative, and the sensation of its first performances in Bayreuth and New York. The Morgan is especially grateful to Dr. Sven Friedrich, director of the Richard Wagner Museum, who made possible the loan of many unique items from his institution.”

THE EXHIBITION

Genesis of the *Ring*

In the mid-nineteenth-century Richard Wagner was intent on creating a specifically German operatic art form. Looking for inspiration, he explored Nordic myths such as the *Edda*, the *Völsunga Saga*, and the *Nibelungenlied*, all preserved in thirteenth-century sources. Traditionally, opera composers set music to text written by a librettist; Wagner, however, wrote his own, beginning in 1848 with a poem, *Siegfrieds Tod* (Siegfried's Death) which was later renamed *Götterdämmerung*. Sensing he needed to give more background to the drama he was envisioning, he wrote the additional poems *Der junge Siegfried* (Young Siegfried, later renamed *Siegfried*), *Die Walküre*, and finally *Das Rheingold*. Thus began the *Ring*. In a letter dated November 11, 1852, on view in the exhibition, Wagner wrote to his sister Luise that he had now almost finished what he called the “*Nibelungen*” poems.

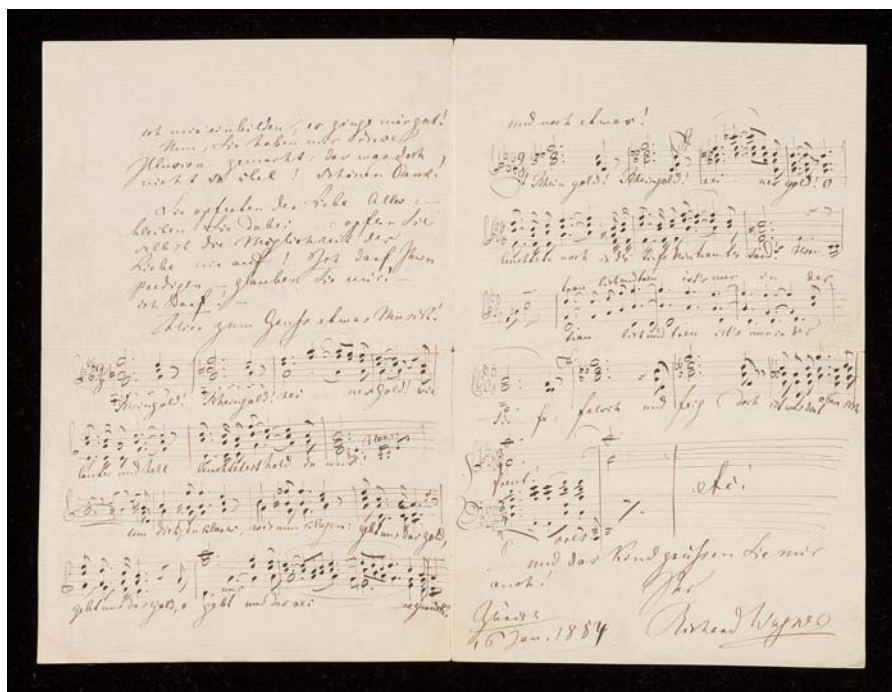


Left: Rogelio de Egusquiza Barrena (1845–1915), *Richard Wagner, 1813-1883*. Etching, aquatint, and drypoint after an 1871 photograph by Franz Hanfstaengl, Munich. Gift of Hester Diamond, 2012. The Morgan Library & Museum. Right: Richard Wagner (1813–1883), *Der Ring des Nibelungen* [libretto], Zurich: E. Kiesling, 1853. The Dannie and Hettie Heineman Collection, Gift of the Heineman Foundation, 1977. The Morgan Library & Museum.

In 1853 Wagner had his work privately printed at his own expense in a limited edition of fifty copies for distribution to his friends. His personal copy, on view in the exhibition, was interleaved with extensive corrections and additions in his own hand. After completing what would become the sung text of the *Ring*, the composer sketched the music for each of the poems or “music dramas.” The exhibition includes never-before-exhibited compositional drafts. From these, Wagner would later compose the orchestral score.

His next major hurdle was securing the financial support that would make production of his work possible. He revised the text and had it commercially published in 1863, adding a twenty-page *Foreword* detailing the necessary requirements for its successful realization, among them an amphitheater-shaped auditorium, an “invisible” orchestra, first-rate singers, stage designers, and machinists. He concluded with suggestions on how his plan could be realized and with a plea for a “German Prince” to offer funds to support the project. Wagner underscored his belief that by supporting the work, the patron would influence German operatic art forever. In the *Foreword*, on view in the exhibition, he asks if this Prince will be found (“Wird dieser Fürst sich finden?”).

In January 1854, he wrote a letter to his friend Franz Liszt begging for money. A day later he wrote to Liszt’s companion, the Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, excusing his behavior. He ends the letter with the closing measures of *Das Rheingold*, which, he explains, he just completed two days previous. Liszt was a staunch supporter of Wagner, but ultimately it was royal support that launched the *Ring* project.



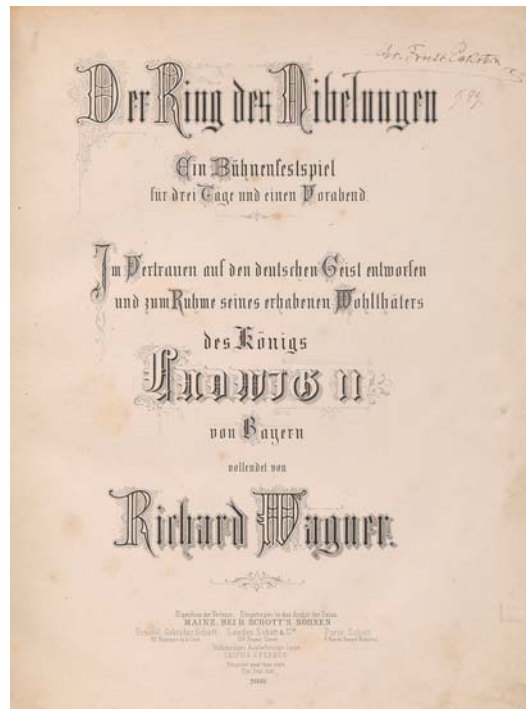
Richard Wagner (1813–1883), Letter to Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein including the closing measure of *Das Rheingold*, signed and dated Zurich, January 16, 1854. Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection, 1968. The Morgan Library & Museum.

King Ludwig II of Bavaria, Funding the *Ring*

With the death of his father, Maximilian II of Bavaria, in March 1864, Ludwig (1845–1886), at the age of eighteen, became King. As a youth, he had been fascinated with the operas of Wagner and studied his writings. Shortly after his accession to the throne, he answered Wagner's call for support. He sent his minister to find the composer, who was in debt and fleeing his creditors, and bring him to Munich.

In May 1864, Wagner met Ludwig II for the first time. Later, from a house provided for him by the King, he wrote to a fellow composer about the good fortune he had encountered, adding that his opera *Tristan* was to be performed, and that work on the *Nibelung* was proceeding according to plans.

In October Wagner signed a contract which, among other things, stipulated that a copy of the *Ring* scores was to be delivered within three years, that the work was the property of the King, and that in addition to a monthly salary, he would receive money to cover debts and furnish his



Left: Ferdinand Piloty the Younger (1828–1895), *King Ludwig II in Bavarian general's uniform and coronation mantle*, 1865. Oil on canvas. Schloss Herrenhiemsee. bpk, Berlin /Schloss Herrenhiemsee, Germany / Art Resource, NY. Right: Richard Wagner (1813–1883), *Das Rheingold*, Mainz: Schott, 1873. First edition, full score. James Fuld Music Collection, 2008. The Morgan Library & Museum.

house. On view in the exhibition is a copy of the first edition full score of *Das Rheingold* open to the dedication to the King:

The Ring of the Nibelung: A Stage Festival Play for three days and a preliminary evening, in dedication to the German Spirit and to the glory of its most high benefactor King Ludwig II of Bavaria, completed by Richard Wagner

The full score of *Walküre* was published in 1874, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* in 1876. For the premiere performances in Munich of *Rheingold* (1869) and *Walküre* (1870) that the King demanded, manuscript copies made by Hans Richter from Wagner's autograph score were used. Richter would eventually become the conductor of the Bayreuth premiere.

Bayreuth: Plans and Challenges

Although Wagner had agreed with Ludwig to premiere the *Ring* in Munich, conflicts with the management of the opera house and its inadequacies caused him to seek a new venue. Bayreuth had an opera house with no resident company and a deep stage, but unfortunately too small a pit for Wagner's needs. Risking the King's support, the composer decided to build a house to his own specifications for the performance of the *Ring* in Bayreuth (but still, fortunately, within Ludwig's domain). In a draft for a pamphlet issued in Berlin, displayed in the exhibition, Wagner details his plans and, for the first time, publicly announces Bayreuth as the site of his theater. The laying of the foundation stone took place on Wagner's fifty-ninth birthday and the festivities included a telegram from King Ludwig. It read:

From the depth of my soul I send you, dearest Friend, my warmest and sincerest congratulations on this day that is so significant for all Germany. May blessing and good fortune attend the great undertaking during the coming year. Today I am more than ever one with you in spirit.

Construction on the Festspielhaus (Festival Theater) was completed in 1876. With the aim of focusing the viewer's attention solely on the drama, there were no tiers of boxes and no ornamentation as in traditional opera houses. Moreover, all seating had excellent sightlines.

Wagner's decision to stage the production in Bayreuth was in defiance of his contract with the King, and he needed to raise funds to build the theater. The King did eventually come to his aid, but in the meanwhile, the composer relied on many Wagner societies that had been initiated for fundraising purposes and gave benefit concerts. The exhibition presents Wagner's draft for such



Left: Carl Emil Doepler (1824–1905), A selection of costume designs, *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Figurinen*, Berlin: Berliner Kunstdruck- und Verlags-Anstalt, 1889, Cosmolithograph. Gift of Hester Diamond, 2012. The Morgan Library & Museum. Right: Amalie Materna (with Grane), Bayreuth production, Photograph by J. Albert, Munich, 1876. Metropolitan Opera Archives.

a program in Vienna in March 1875, in which he conducted excerpts from *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods). Amalie Materna, who would create the role of Brünnhilde, and Franz Glatz were soloists. After Vienna, Wagner traveled to Pest where Franz Liszt lent his services. Although retired from the concert stage, Liszt, ever Wagner's champion, performed Beethoven's Emperor Concerto with Hans Richter conducting, greatly increasing ticket sales.

In 1872, Wagner had commissioned Joseph Hoffmann, a Viennese landscape painter, to create stage designs. Photographs of Hoffmann's sketches are on display as well as a selection of chromolithographs of costumes designed by Emil Doepler, who had been a costume designer at the Weimar Court Theater. Ironically, though Wagner hand-picked Doepler, the composer was never pleased with his designs. Nonetheless, they were used for Anton Seidl's Metropolitan Opera productions and maintained their authority for many years. On view in the exhibition is a 1911 Metropolitan Opera costume for Brünnhilde based on Doepler's design.

Premieres

In August 1876, the first complete public performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was presented over four days (August 13, 14, 16, and 17) with Hans Richter conducting. Two more complete cycles followed later that month.

Royalty, dignitaries, musicians, and artists from around the world came to witness what many considered to be the musical event of the century. Although Wagner, ever the perfectionist, cautioned that the performances fell short of his ideal, the audience reception was extraordinarily positive.

Abhorring publicity and wishing only to experience the work free of curious onlookers, Ludwig, Wagner's principal benefactor, expressed the desire to hear the *Ring* in private. Catering to his wishes, the composer arranged for the Prince to attend the general rehearsals for the premiere, and provided a private box for him to view the public performance of the Third Cycle.

Within twenty-four hours of the Bayreuth performances, readers of the *New York Herald* were able to learn about the ongoing musical event via transatlantic cable, the first time it was used to transmit music criticism. Wagner's work had been known to New Yorkers since 1859 with the performance of *Tannhäuser* at the Stadt-Theater on the Bowery.

Anton Seidl, the future principal conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, came to Bayreuth as an apprentice in 1872 on the advice of Hans Richter. Seidl lived with the Wagner family for six years, and among other things was a copyist on the *Ring*. Working as a coach and staging assistant on the 1876 performances positioned him to conduct the work throughout Central Europe and England. Much sought after by the Metropolitan Opera, Seidl came to New York in 1885 and spread the Wagner canon to the United States. He conducted the spectacular American premiere of the complete *Ring* cycle in March 1889.



Left: "The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth – Exterior of the Theatre," *The Graphic*, August 12, 1876. Bequest of Gordon N. Ray, 1987. The Morgan Library & Museum, Right: Tickets for the *Ring* cycle, Bayreuth, August, 1876. James Fuld Music Collection, 2008. The Morgan Library & Museum.

The *Ring's* Importance to Music History

Wagner's music dramas influenced the work of all operatic composers who followed and changed the musical landscape forever. Gone were the set arias that sacrificed dramatic flow to show off the vocal abilities of the singer. Vocal lines were more speech-like than lyrical. The dramas developed over large expanses of time in an uninterrupted flow of music, with a network of leitmotifs or themes associated with people, emotions, and objects. Today, 140 years after its premiere in Bayreuth, the *Ring* remains a staple of opera companies the world over and an ongoing musical event whenever it is performed.

Public Programs

LECTURE

The New Richard Wagner Museum Bayreuth

Sven Friedrich

The legendary former house of Richard Wagner in Bayreuth, "Wahnfried," became a museum in 1976. After a five year renovation and expansion, it reopened in summer 2015 to coincide with the annual Bayreuth opera festival. Museum director Dr. Sven Friedrich talks about the eventful history of "Wahnfried," its collections, and how their new museum contextualizes Wagner's work in later decades. This lecture is co-sponsored by the Wagner Society of New York and precedes the Morgan's upcoming exhibition *Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic*, opening January 29.

Friday, January 22, 6:30 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission. Free for Morgan and Wagner Society members, and students with valid ID. Email tickets@themorgan.org to reserve.

CONCERT

Forging an Epic: On the Page and on the Stage

How do we bring such masterpieces as Wagner's *Ring* from the page to the stage? Francesca Zambello, Artistic Director of the Washington National Opera explores how she takes the words and music of Wagner and translates them into the visual ideas for the sets and costumes. The presentation will include visuals and musical selections performed by artists from the WNO *Ring* production.

Tuesday, February 2, 7 pm*

Tickets: \$25; \$20 for Morgan and Wagner Society members

*The exhibition *Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic* will open at 6 pm for program attendees.

GALLERY TALK

Wagner's *Ring*: Forging an Epic

Frances Barulich, Mary Flagler Cary Curator of Music Manuscripts and Printed Music

Friday, February 12, 6:30 pm

Tickets: All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

FILM

Die Nibelungen

Director: Fritz Lang
12 pm – 5:45 pm

Based on the same Nordic legend that inspired Wagner's *Ring*, *Die Nibelungen* is one of the greatest artistic and technical achievements of the German silent cinema. Presented in two parts, the epic film was restored in 2012 by the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung and includes the original score by Gottfried Huppertz. Films introduced by filmmaker and writer Hilan Warshaw, President, Overtone Films LLC.

The exhibition *Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic* will open for program attendees before the screening.

Siegfried

(1924, 149 minutes)

Scripted by Lang and his wife Thea von Harbou the saga begins by constructing an enchanted kingdom populated by dragons, magical trolls, and heroic figures defined by rigid codes of honor.

Kriemhild's Revenge

(1925, 131 minutes)

In the long-underrated second half, the death of Siegfried causes fantasy to devolve into nightmare, as his beloved Kriemhild enacts a vengeance that contaminates everyone in its path—a vengeance as ferocious and uncompromising as anything the cinema has ever depicted.

Sunday, February 28, 12 pm

Tickets: Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Admission Desk on the day of the screening.

The film will be shown in two parts, Siegfried will start at 12 pm and Kriemhild's Revenge at 3:30 pm

GALLERY TALK

Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic

Frances Barulich, Mary Flagler Cary Curator of Music Manuscripts and Printed Music

Friday, March 18, 1 pm

Tickets: All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

FILM

Wagner & Me

Director: Patrick McGrady (2010, 89 minutes)

English actor and raconteur Stephen Fry explores his passion for Richard Wagner's music as well as his troubled legacy. Set against the backdrop of the annual Bayreuth Festival in Germany, this fascinating documentary reveals the life and legacy of one of music's most complicated geniuses, and features a soundtrack of Wagner's extraordinary music.

The exhibition *Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic* will be open for program attendees before the event.

Friday, April 1, 7 pm

Tickets: Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Admission Desk on the day of the screening.

CONCERT

George London Foundation Celebration Concert

Ben Heppner	Master of Ceremonies
Sondra Radvanovsky	soprano
Christine Brewer	soprano
Ailyn Pérez	soprano
Susanne Mentzer	mezzo-soprano
Matthew Polenzani	tenor
James Morris	bass-baritone
Eric Owens	bass-baritone
Brandon Cedel	bass-baritone
Craig Rutenberg and Ken Noda	piano

Wednesday, April 6, 7 pm*

Tickets: \$75; \$65 for members. Limited ticket availability.

*The exhibition *Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic* will open at 6 pm for program attendees.

FAMILY

Spring Family Fair

What do Richard Wagner and Andy Warhol have in common? Come to the Morgan Spring Family Fair, use your imagination, and see for yourself! Our spring exhibitions *Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic* and *Warhol by the Book* inspire a playful take on both artists through costumes, head-in-the-hole fun, a photo shoot, and craft-making. Experience an interactive performance by the Ben Jam troupe and hear a unique live radio show complete with comical sound effects by Spring Training Productions.

Sunday, April 17, 2–5 pm

Tickets: \$8 for adults; \$6 for members; \$2 for children; free for Cool Culture members

Organization and Sponsorship

Wagner's Ring: Forging an Epic is organized by Frances Barulich, Mary Flagler Cary Curator of Music Manuscripts and Printed Music at the Morgan Library & Museum.

Lead funding for this exhibition is generously provided by the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Charles E. Pierce, Jr. Fund for Exhibitions and Hester Diamond.

Special thanks go to Brigitte Merk-Erbe, the mayor of Bayreuth, who helped facilitate the loan agreement between the Wagner Museum and the Morgan.



The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

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