



Richard WAGNER

Symphony in C major

Wilhelm Richard Wagner (22 May 1813 – 13 February 1883) was a German composer, theatre director, and conductor. Wagner's stepfather, actor and playwright Ludwig Geyer, involved the young boy in his plays, and inspired Wagner to write a drama, *Leubald*, at 13. While Wagner did have some musical education at the time, his inability to set the text to music led him to further study composition. After publishing his Op. 1 – the *Piano Sonata in B-flat major* (1831) – while enrolled at Leipzig University, Wagner would compose his first and only symphony, his first completed opera, and held positions as a choirmaster, and then a musical director in Magdeburg. Unfortunately, the opera house in Magdeburg would close in 1836 due to a financial collapse, leaving Wagner bankrupt. He married a leading actress from the theatre and left Germany, escaping from creditors and making scant livings in numerous cities. After completing his opera, *Reinzi* (1840), Wagner moved back to Germany, but his return lasted only until 1849, as he once again had to flee – this time to escape an arrest warrant after participating as a revolutionary in the May Uprising in Dresden. Forced to stay out of Germany for the next 12 years, Wagner and his wife moved to Switzerland. As his wife fell into a depression and Wagner had no regular income, he fell into ill-health from his grim situation and struggled to compose. Instead, Wagner began writing essays, including "The Artwork of the Future" (1849) in which he coined the term, *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total work of art"), a concept of a musical work which synthesizes nearly all forms of art. At this time, he also began work on the libretti and music for his Ring Cycle. Wagner returned to Germany in 1862 alone – the result of his affair with a poet-writer. In 1864, Wagner's luck changed for the better, as the new king of Bavaria – Ludwig II – took a keen liking to Wagner, settled his debts, and financially supported his career. During this time, Wagner would have an illegitimate child with Cosima, the wife of conductor Hans von Bülow (and daughter of Franz Liszt), which caused a scandal in Munich and put him out of favour with the court, forcing King Ludwig to ask him to leave. In 1871, Wagner moved to Bayreuth and began planning to have his Ring Cycle performed at a newly-built opera house, the *Bayreuth Festspielhaus*. To support the construction of the building and the planned festival, "Wagner societies" were created all across Europe. Wagner devised numerous new designs which are now common, such as dimming the auditorium and using an orchestra pit. This festival propelled Richard Wagner into worldwide fame, but he would soon become ill, and was only able to compose one more opera, *Parfisal* (1882), before passing at the age of 69.

Symphony in C Major, *WWV 29* (1832) was written by Wagner at the age of 19 in the span of six weeks. Clearly inspired by Beethoven, Clara Wieck's (who later married Robert Schumann and became Clara Schumann) father was in attendance for the piece's premiere, and Clara wrote to her future husband that "a symphony of his [Wagner] was performed, which is said to be as like as two peas to Beethoven's Symphony in A major!"

The first movement (*Sostenuto e maestoso – Allegro con brio*) begins with a slow introduction, but soon launches into sonata form. Stylistically, Wagner's harmonic and melodic development is notably more classical/early-romantic than his later works, showing the clear influence of Beethoven's (and Mozart's late) symphonies. Wagner also borrowed orchestration ideas from Carl Maria von Weber, whose opening movements were said to resemble opera overtures more than symphonies.

The second movement (*Andante ma non troppo, un poco maestoso*) begins with a motif borrowed from the coda of the first movement. The minor-key movement carries a characteristic nobility common in middle-period Beethoven.

The third movement (*Allegro assai - Un poco meno allegro*) is marked by a dynamic scherzo alternating with a contrasting light trio. A short coda rounds out the dance in preparation for the frantic final movement.

The fourth movement (*Allegro molto e vivace*) begins with a triumphant C major chord which almost identically resembles the final chord of the previous movement's coda. The finale proceeds in a sonata form that recalls the first movement, with the main theme involving a blistering sequence of eighth notes in numerous diatonic scales. The piece gains momentum and accelerates to an energetic climax, ending the ambitious symphonic work of the young composer.