

MUSIC OF
**RICHARD
WAGNER**

**"THE PRESIDENT'S OWN"
UNITED STATES
MARINE BAND**
COLONEL JOHN BOURGEOIS, DIRECTOR



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“The President’s Own”

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|---|--|-------|
| ① | “Das Liebesmahl der Apostel” arranged by M. Pohle | 10:00 |
| ② | DAS RHEINGOLD
Prelude transcribed by John Bourgeois
“Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla” | 11:55 |
| ③ | DIE WALKÜRE
“Die Walküre” Fantasie arranged by Arthur Seidel | 17:00 |
| ④ | SIEGFRIED
“Siegfried” Fantasie arranged by Arthur Seidel | 21:06 |
| ⑤ | GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG
Siegfried’s Funeral March transcribed by Howard Bowlin
Finale transcribed by John Bourgeois | 11:09 |

RICHARD WAGNER AND THE WINDS

By Paul Hume

Music Critic Emeritus, *The Washington Post*

Richard Wagner had a lifelong love affair with wind instruments. The famous opening of his early operatic triumph, *Rienzi*, is that long A on the solo trumpet, the note that must be taken quietly, swelled out to a *forte* and then shaded with a perfect diminuendo. (Most trumpet players live in the hope that the conductor will not decide to open a program with it.)

For Wagner there were simply not enough brass instruments to produce an ideally balanced brass choir, so he proceeded to invent what are today known as Wagner tubas, instruments that combine the agile flexibility of cornets with the mellowness of the deeper-voiced tubas. These enrich not only the entire scoring of the Ring cycle but of, for example, many of the symphonies of one of Wagner’s chief admirers, Anton Bruckner.

Look at the scoring for the Ring: three of each woodwind instrument, plus English horn and bass clarinet, eight horns, four tubas, three trumpets and four trombones, contrabass tuba, bass trumpet, and contrabass trombone. An aggregation of 36 wind instruments! But far more important than mere numbers is their deployment.

Think of the dramatic uses to which Wagner put these instruments. For instance in *Siegfried*, of which you will hear on this recording a grand fantasy, the tubas are used to conjure up for us a vivid portrait of the

dragon Fafner, roused from his sleep, yawning at the presumptuous boy who has awakened him. But as the dragon roars in his rage, it is the tubas that give us his angry menace. When the youthful Siegfried meets the Wanderer – Wotan in disguise – the chief god is heralded by a choir of horns. Earlier in the forging scene, when Siegfried is at work to weld together the pieces of the sword, Nothung, which was shattered by Wotan’s spear in *Die Walküre*, Wagner uses the full brass choir to suggest the weight and labor required to forge the sword anew.

And toward the end of the opera, as Siegfried begins his ascent to the flame-surrounded rock where Brünnhilde lies asleep, his two themes sound, commingled in the choir of eight horns and the answering chorus of trumpets and trombones. The wind choirs have been no less busy in the operas on either side of *Siegfried*. No moment in *Die Walküre* is more dramatic than the sounding of the sword theme in the first act when, for a moment, the firelight shines on the hilt of the sword buried in the ash tree in the center of Hunding’s crude home. At that moment it is the solo trumpet that creates the very special thrill.

As for *Götterdämmerung*, that incredible pinnacle and inevitable ending of the massive four-part cycle, it is unthinkable without the sound of Wagner’s winds, wood and

brass, in the forefront. Horn players rejoice in the exultant call given to them as Siegfried leaves his bride, Brünnhilde, to begin his journey down the Rhine to new adventures. And in the final scenes of the music drama, it is the winds that dominate the scene from the beginning of Siegfried's Funeral March to the opening of Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene, that incomparable closing not only to *Götterdämmerung* but to the entire cycle. Nowhere in the vast panorama of the cycle is the trumpet solo, recalling the sword motive, more majestically proclaimed than in the Funeral March.

The Immolation Scene is introduced by a wind choir that sets the scene for Brünnhilde's first words, "Great logs place for me there on the bank of the Rhine in a pile." No other instruments are conceivable once Wagner has made his ideal choice. The solo trumpet and clarinet have their moments of grandeur and then, again, the brass are heard as Brünnhilde asks, in speaking of Siegfried's betrayal, which she now fully comprehends, "Do you know how that was? O ye of eternal oaths the guardians, turn your eyes on my grief in bloom, see your eternal guilt!"

To those who know this scene intimately, one of the passages in which not a single note could be replaced is that brooding episode in which Brünnhilde speaks of the ravens: "Thy ravens, too, I hear rustling; with fearfully awaited tidings I send them both now home. Rest, rest, thou God!" Nothing but the woodwind choir could rightly support her moving address to her all-father

Wotan. Immediately thereafter the brass choir sounds once more as she prepares to give up the ring that caused all the trouble: "My inheritance I take as my own. Accursed ring! Terrible ring! Thy gold I seize and give it away." To the initiated Wagnerians nothing is more inspired than the composer's magisterial employment of woodwinds and brass in these moments of highest inspiration.

The tradition of hearing some of Wagner's most inspired music played by the full complement of winds found in the military band is one that reaches back directly to Wagner's time in which he often used these very forces. When the cornerstone for Wagner's dream theater at Bayreuth was laid on May 22, 1872, marking the bringing to actuality a concept that had haunted the composer for many years, the music for the ceremony was that of a military band playing the Huldigungs March. Wagner had written this eight years earlier for the 19th birthday of young King Ludwig for whose patronage Wagner hoped, and his hopes were not in vain. In a poem presented to the king at that same time, Wagner wrote, "It was your summons that snatched me from the night that numbed my strength in winter's cold . . . Now I tread new paths in pride and joy, in the summer kingdom of grace."

Military bands have long played a prominent role in bringing Wagner to the attentive ears of both neophytes and long-established Wagner lovers. George Bernard Shaw, that "Perfect Wagnerite," wrote, "the first time I ever heard a note of Wagner's

music was in my small boy days, when I stumbled upon a military band playing the *Tannhäuser* march." Long after Mr. Shaw thus heard his first Wagner, I heard something very similar on my first visit to Venice. As I was strolling through that incredible square in front of St. Mark's Cathedral, I heard, from some unseen place, not the march but the entire overture to *Tannhäuser* being played by a band. I wandered slowly toward the source of the sound and found, to my delight, in one of those little mini-squares that hide behind the grander façades that line the large square, a military band playing away fervently. And Wagner sounded entirely at home in the surroundings, which were in fact only a few yards away from the Palazzo Vendramin where Wagner died on February 13, 1883. That band was simply carrying on a tradition that had existed in Wagner's time because it was noted that in the days immediately after his death the municipal band did not play in St. Mark's square.

The *Venice Gazette* said, editorially, "We will remember the star which sank under the musical horizon." And Giuseppe Verdi wrote his friend and publisher, Giulio Ricordi, "When I read the news yesterday, I may truly say I was crushed. Not a word more!—A great individual has gone from us, a name that will leave a powerful impress in the history of art." Reading through his letter, Verdi then crossed out the word "powerful" and wrote instead, "most powerful."

Let us follow Wagner's body in the days immediately after his death. On the 16th a

procession of gondolas, draped in black, proceeded down the Grand Canal from the Palazzo Vendramin to the railroad station. How strangely prophetic that only four weeks earlier, Franz Liszt, who was not only Wagner's great admirer and protagonist, but also his father-in-law, had been moved by the sight of a similar group of gondolas to write his piano work, *La lugubre gondole*. Late on the 17th the train arrived in Bayreuth where, the next day, the coffin was taken to Wagner's villa Wahnfried—the name means "peace from illusions." But before the coffin left the station a brief public ceremony took place. There a military band played Siegfried's Funeral March. Thus in hearing that Funeral March on this recording you are hearing it very much as it must have sounded on that mournful day in Bayreuth over a century ago.

One thousand two hundred men's voices and a *concealed* orchestra of 100! Those were the forces called for in Richard Wagner's one-of-a-kind work *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel*, which he wrote for a special gathering of all the male choirs in Saxony in 1843. Wagner had recently been named conductor of the Dresden Choral Society, which was a central part of the huge chorus of men's voices. And it was Wagner himself who led the first performance of the work on July 6th in that year.

Well aware of the possibilities for monotony in writing music that was to last for around one-half hour, and with no women's voices to brighten the choral colors, Wagner

decided on a three-part work, though one to be performed without any pauses. Wagner wrote the text himself, deciding to have it depict, as he wrote, "a quite large choral scene depicting the first feast of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost." He divided the male chorus into 3 parts and placed 40 of them in the cupola of the *Frauenkirche* of Dresden where the choral festival was given. The voices of the distant singers were intended to suggest the descent of the Holy Ghost.

What is of special interest is that Wagner decided not to have the orchestra – which was concealed behind the large chorus – enter until the work was half over. By this subtle use of the orchestra, and the division of the chorus, Wagner gave the work as much variety in sound and spatial effect as he could conceive.

When it was over, he wrote, "I was not displeased by the success of this work." However, he added, "This experience convinced me of the inherent foolishness of such gigantic choral undertakings and produced in me a decided antipathy to concerning myself with them in any way in the future."

In any case, the transcription for large band lends the entire score of the *Liebesmahl der Apostel* both a mystical quality at times, and at other times a textural splendor that Wagner might well have admired.

Having observed the centennial of Wagner's death in 1983, the population of Wagner lovers today is large. To these, as well as to even the most casual listeners to orchestral and band concerts, Wagner's affection for, and matchless skill in handling wind choirs is continually borne out, whether in the opening measures of the *Tannhäuser* overture, or the choir of horns that signal the beginning of the last act of *Die Meistersinger*; or that bleakest of English horn solos that opens the final act of *Tristan und Isolde*. As listeners to this recording will hear frequently, the operas of the Ring cycle, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*, which are inconceivable without the full panoply of woodwinds and brass with which Wagner reminds us of his gods and goddesses, his heroes and his villains, his giants and his dwarfs, the inhabitants of his nether worlds, his earthly creatures, and his immortals.

In Washington the tradition of hearing Wagner played by some of the greatest military bands in history is a long one, carried on in the concerts played regularly by the United States Marine Band, on whose programs the name of Wagner is a frequent visitor. The musicians are continuing a tradition begun and frequently practiced by Wagner himself.

CREDITS

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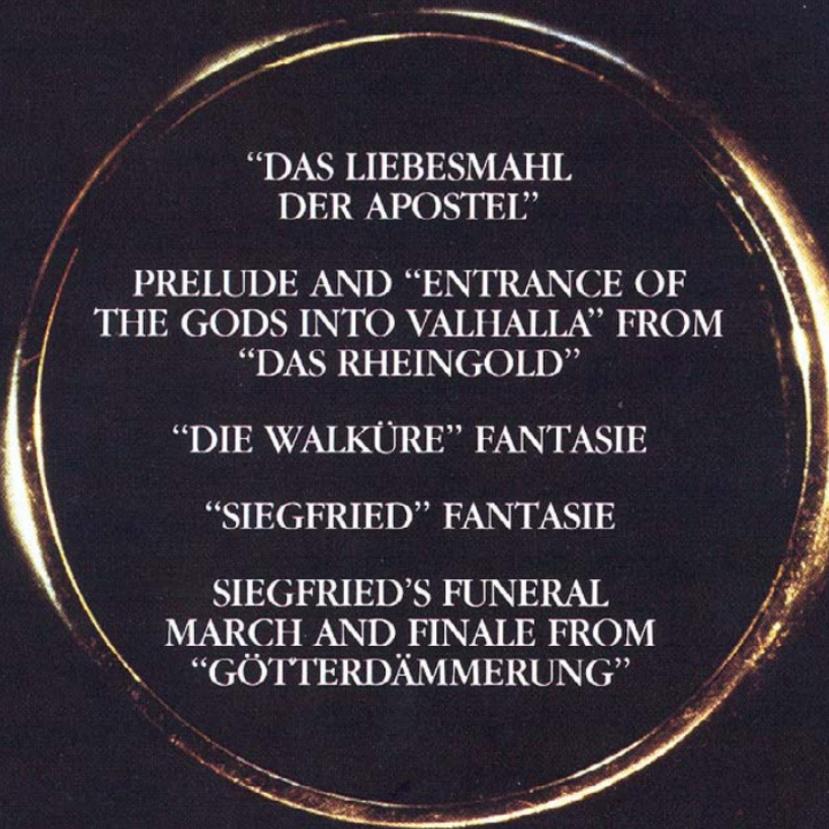
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For more information about the United States Marine Band, please write to:

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