



# WAGNER

## Overtures

DDD  
8.557055

**Faust • Rienzi • Christoph Columbus**

**Malaga Philharmonic Orchestra • Alexander Rahbari**



## Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

### Overtures

Richard Wagner inspired in his contemporaries extremes of reaction. His career was in many ways thoroughly discreditable. He betrayed friends and patrons, accumulated debts with abandon, and seemed, in pursuit of his aims, an unprincipled opportunist. Nevertheless, whatever his defects of character, he exercised a hypnotic influence over his immediate followers, while his creation of a new form of music-drama, in which the arts were combined, and the magnitude of his ambitious conception continue to fascinate.

As a boy in Leipzig Wagner was inspired by the example of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, while his literary ambitions drew strength from a study of Shakespeare. Study of music in Leipzig was followed in 1833 by appointment as chorus-master at the opera in Würzburg, through the agency of an elder brother, a principal tenor there. The next year he became music director to Heinrich Bethmann's theatre company, moving with it to Magdeburg, largely at the insistence of the actress Minna Planer, whom he followed to Königsberg, marrying her there in November 1836. The following spring saw him as music director to the Königsberg theatre and in the summer he took up an appointment as music director in Riga, where he was joined again by Minna, who had earlier deserted him for other lovers. Employment in Riga ended in March 1839 and debts now forced Wagner to take flight, sailing to London, but finally finding refuge and a possible realisation of ambitions in Paris.

While the French capital offered experience that proved fruitful, there were practical difficulties in earning a living. In 1842, however, Wagner succeeded, with the help of Meyerbeer, in securing a staging of his opera *Rienzi* in Dresden, followed by *Die fliegende Holländer* and appointment as music director at the court opera. He held this position until involvement with revolutionaries in 1849 forced him to seek refuge

in Switzerland. Years spent there, interrupted by periods in Paris, Venice, and Vienna, brought growing achievement as a composer and the patronage of King Ludwig II of Bavaria in Munich, where the great music dramas of his maturity were staged. Rivalries forced his departure, again to Switzerland, where, on news of the death of his wife, who had remained in Dresden, he was joined by Liszt's illegitimate daughter Cosima, the wife of the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow. A year before her divorce from von Bülow, she bore Wagner a son, Siegfried, and brought with her two daughters that Wagner had fathered. The couple married in 1870 and the following year Wagner turned his attention to the building of his own opera house in Bayreuth, with further support from King Ludwig, from whom Wagner had been estranged for some years. It was in the new theatre that the first complete performance of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was performed in 1876, to be followed in 1882 by the first staging of *Parsifal*. Over the years Wagner had generally spent the winter in the warmer climate of Italy. He died in Venice in February 1883.

The climax of Wagner's career came with the creation of Bayreuth and the monumental tetralogy *Der Ring*. The overtures included in the present release largely represent his earlier work, compositions that suggest, at least, something of what was to follow. The grand tragic opera *Rienzi, der letzte der Tribunen* (*Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes*) marked his first success, when it was staged in Dresden in 1842. It is based on the 1835 novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, which Wagner read in the summer of 1837. Wagner's libretto largely follows the scheme of the novel. The opera is set in fourteenth-century Rome. Cola Rienzi has pledged to avenge his brother's murder by the powerful Colonna family. Adriano Colonna, however, is in love with Rienzi's sister Irene, whom Paolo Orsini, scion of a rival noble Roman family, has tried

to abduct. Rienzi, a champion of republicanism, enjoys popular esteem, but refuses to become king, offering himself, instead, as tribune of the people. He is finally destroyed by conspirators, after his excommunication, dying with his sister in the destruction of the Capitol. The opening trumpet-call of the overture, a motif that returns, suggests Rienzi's power as a revolutionary. Other themes heard in the overture include Rienzi's prayer from Act V, an ascending motif associated with the people, a hymn of battle and a march theme from Act II.

In 1831 Wagner, full of ambition as a composer, had left Leipzig University. Among a number of compositions was the 1832 overture to the play *König Enzo* (King Enzo) by Ernest Raupach, a prolific writer of the time, credited with some 117 plays, well in accord with popular taste. The similarities of plot with those of *Fidelio* suggested an overture in a similar mood, influenced by Beethoven. In the play the king of the title is held in a dungeon, while his daughter Lucia, a rôle taken by Wagner's elder sister Rosalie, attempts to help him, having entered the prison in disguise.

*Das Liebesverbot, oder Die Novize von Palermo* (The Ban on Love, or the Novice of Palermo), based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, was completed in 1836 and given one very poor performance in Magdeburg. The use of castanets and tambourine suggests Palermo, while other themes are associated, in the manner of leitmotifs, with characters in the action. The plot revolves around the Regent Friedrich, who has forbidden immorality, including, it seems love, a ban under which the young Claudio has been condemned. The young novice Isabella is induced to appeal to Friedrich, who agrees to release Claudio in return for her favours. Her place is taken by a fellow-novice, Mariana, Friedrich's former wife. His hypocritical behaviour is revealed at a carnival celebration that he had banned, and a measure of freedom, and, it seems, free love, is restored by the return of the king. The opera is influenced by the music that Wagner had encountered, either by study or

practical experience in the opera house, notably here French and Italian models. He explained in his autobiography *Mein Leben* (My Life) how the second performance, in front of a virtually empty house, had to be called off after the young tenor who sang Claudio was severely beaten by the jealous husband of the prima donna.

Wagner had completed *Die Feen* (The Fairies) in 1834, but it was not performed until after his death. He based the libretto on Gozzi's *La donna serpente* and was at the time greatly influenced by Weber and Marschner, the latter's *Vampyr* and *Hans Heiling* having been in the repertoire at Würzburg. Ada, half fairy, half mortal, agrees to marry the King of Tramond, who has strayed into her realm while hunting. Forbidden to seek her identity he gives way to his curiosity. Ada disappears, now forced to test him, before they can be together again as mortals. He fails her tests and curses her, leaving her condemned to petrification, a fate from which she is eventually released by the King, himself restored from madness to seek her in the underworld through the power of his music. The overture, competently crafted, has references to what is to follow, leading through the trials imposed on the two lovers to final resolution.

The overture to Theodor Apel's play *Christoph Columbus* was written for a staging in Magdeburg by Bethmann's troupe. Apel, a close friend of Wagner and two years younger, was well-to-do, and of material assistance to his friend, as occasion arose in these earlier years. He made a significant financial contribution towards the staging of his indifferent drama. The overture was used by Wagner on later occasions and through the help of Meyerbeer, whose recommendation to Dresden was to lead to the staging of *Rienzi* there, was able to hear it played in Paris in 1840. The music is effective enough, a fine enough introduction to the play, the events of which it clearly adumbrates.

Wagner's respect for Goethe, shared by his contemporaries and following generations, led to an

attempt in Paris in 1840 to write a Faust Symphony, under the influence of Berlioz. The original overture, the first movement of the proposed work, was orchestrated a few years later, and Liszt, who had received a visit from Wagner in 1848, played the work in Weimar. It was presumably Liszt's *Faust* Symphony that persuaded Wagner to revise the overture to offer a

fuller view of the drama. The revised work was completed in 1855. It opens in the old scholar's study and reflects in its course the intervention of Mephistopheles and its consequences.

**Keith Anderson**

## **Malaga Philharmonic Orchestra**

The orchestra of the city of Malaga, with the support of the municipal and regional authorities, gave its first concert on 14th February 1991 in the Teatro Municipal Miguel de Cervantes, the beginning of activities that have brought orchestral concerts devoted to music of the standard repertoire and to the work of recent composers, with chamber music and operatic performances. The orchestra has collaborated with leading conductors and soloists, with concerts in the region and throughout Spain, recordings and a particular attention to the contemporary and to composers from the region. In 2001 the orchestra inaugurated the new season in the Greek city of Salonika and it has also appeared in festivals, including those of Prague, Brno and Bratislava. The achievement of the orchestra has been recognised by the award of the M. Capital Culture Prize and the Premio Málaga. The principal conductor of the orchestra is Alexander Rahbari.

## **Alexander Rahbari**

Alexander Rahbari, who now has Austrian nationality, was born in Iran into a musical family. After studying composition and conducting with Gottfried von Einem, Hans Swarowsky and Karl Österreicher at the Vienna Music Academy, he returned to Iran to direct the Conservatory, serving at the same time as director of the Teheran Opera and of various orchestras. Returning to Europe in 1977, he won first prize in the Besançon International Conductors Competition and the following year was awarded the Silver Medal in Geneva. In 1979 he was invited by Herbert von Karajan to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and from 1980 was the latter's assistant at Salzburg. This marked the start of a flourishing international career with appearances in leading concert halls and opera houses throughout the world. In the 1986-1987 season he was principal guest conductor of the BRTN Philharmonic Orchestra, of which he became principal conductor the following year. He is principal guest conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and has conducted more than ninety leading orchestras throughout the world. In 1992 he opened the London season with *Simon Boccanegra* and returned there in 1995 to conduct *La forza del destino*, among many other operatic successes in various countries. In 1996 he became principal conductor of the Virtuosi of Prague and from 2000 has served as principal conductor of the Malaga Philharmonic Orchestra in Spain, where he has enjoyed considerable success, conducting national and regional orchestras.

The great German composer Richard Wagner was one of the major creative figures of the nineteenth century, whose crowning achievement was the creation of Bayreuth and the monumental *Der Ring*. This collection of overtures dates mainly from Wagner's early twenties when the composer was learning his craft in provincial opera houses under the influence of Berlioz, Meyerbeer and Weber. They are expertly written works with unmistakable signs of the mastery of orchestration and exuberance of melodic invention that were to follow. The concluding *Faust* overture, originally intended as the opening movement of a proposed *Faust Symphony*, was completed in 1855.

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|---|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Rienzi                             | 11:09 |
| 2 | König Enzo (King Enzo)             | 9:27  |
| 3 | Das Liebesverbot (The Ban on Love) | 7:36  |
| 4 | Die Feen (The Fairies)             | 10:40 |
| 5 | Christoph Columbus                 | 7:56  |
| 6 | Faust                              | 12:19 |

**Malaga Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**Alexander Rahbari**

Recorded at the Teatro Cervantes, Malaga, Spain from 2nd to 4th April, 2002

Producer: Michael Seberich • Engineers: Michael Seberich & Peter Golser

Booklet notes: Keith Anderson

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(The Art Archive / Palazzo Pitti Florence / Dagli Orti)




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59:06



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