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***DIE MEISTERSINGER*, NEW YORK CITY,
AND THE METROPOLITAN OPERA:
THE INTERSECTION OF ART AND POLITICS DURING TWO WORLD WARS**

by

GWEN D'AMICO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Musicology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York
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and Politics During Two World Wars

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Gwen D'Amico

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in
satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Die Meistersinger, New York City, and The Metropolitan Opera: The Intersection of Art and Politics During Two World Wars

By

Gwen D'Amico

Advisor: Professor Allan Atlas

In 1945, after a five-year hiatus, the Metropolitan Opera returned Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* to its stage. It had been the only one of Wagner's operas that had been banned during World War II, ostensibly because of its German nationalism and association with the Third Reich. But was it the German nationalism or Wagner's own anti-Semitism that caused the unease? What resounded with the audiences? World War II stands at an historic cross roads in the reception of *Die Meistersinger* in America. This is where the present day "problem" with this work begins. The Metropolitan Opera's decision created a space that allowed others to follow suit. In effect, the Met's cancellation tacitly upheld and affirmed all that is perceived—both in the literature and by audiences—as negative in the opera.

This study examines the interior politics of *Die Meistersinger* and the environment at the Metropolitan Opera in order to determine why the work was performed to acclaim in New York from 1886 until World War I, but subsequently banned during both wars. Cultural and political factors at work in New York in the 1940s will also be considered in order to understand the response of audiences to what some perceived as a very "German" opera within the larger context of American Wagnerism and, indeed, Wagnerism today. In the end, this study represents a "political history" of *Die Meistersinger* viewed through the prism of New York during two World Wars.

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I would not have come to the study of Wagner without the early exposure given to me by my family. Their long devotion to opera and particular love of Wagner set me on this path. Only parents such as mine would have dragged a recalcitrant nine-year old to the Metropolitan Opera to see the then-new Otto Schenk / Günther Schneider-Siemssen production of *Tannhäuser*.

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INTRODUCTION

*Die Meistersinger is one of the most typically German of all German dramatic works.*¹

Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* is unique in the annals of New York's Metropolitan Opera: it is the only opera that was ever banned twice for political reasons, both times the victim of anti-German sentiment brought about by two World Wars. This dissertation traces the career of *Die Meistersinger* at the Met with special emphasis on the opera's fate during the wars and the years leading up to them. What follows provides both an overview of the substance of the dissertation as a whole and a review of the most important literature.

OVERVIEW

On January 12, 1945, the Metropolitan Opera Company mounted a production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. It was the company's first production of the opera in five years. About the revival, Edward Johnson, then General Manager of the Met, said, "The American public deserves a pat on the back. By its response to our projected revival it has shown a growing maturity. During the last war all German-language opera had to be dropped from the repertoire, but during this one we have continued to give Wagner operas regularly."² *Die Meistersinger*, however, was not among the Wagner operas that had been given regularly; it had been removed, among other reasons, owing to

¹ "'Die Meistersinger' at Met: First Performance of Wagner's Comedy under Mr. Toscanini," *New York Times*, 27 March 1910, 11.

² Mark A. Schubart, "Meistersinger Returns," *New York Times*, 7 January 1945, X5.

its perceived German nationalistic content.³ Furthermore, it had long been known both as Adolf Hitler's favorite opera and seen as the "national" opera of the Third Reich. To remove a popular opera from the repertoire owing to political and cultural exigencies is uncommon, particularly for the stalwart Met. Still, the company had decided that it would be in its best interest if the opera were not performed during the war.

The highly curious nature of this decision is compounded when viewed in the context of the historical triangle of Richard Wagner, the Met, and the City of New York. New York City was the core of American Wagnerism. All of Wagner's operas had their United States premieres in New York City, most of them at the Met. As I will show in Chapter 1, the Met owed its initial success both to Wagner's operas and to New York's musically and culturally influential German population,⁴ and, as a corollary, the

³ Of the perceived nationalism contained within the dialogue of the opera, one speech stands out in particular. In the final scene of the opera, Hans Sachs addresses a large crowd and states, "[. . .] ehrt Eure deutschen Meister! Dann bannt ihr gute Geister; und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst, zerging' in Dunst das heil'ge röm'sche Reich, uns bliebe gleich die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!" ("[. . .] honor your German masters, then you will conjure up good spirits! And if you favor their endeavors, even if the Holy Roman Empire should dissolve in mist, for us there would yet remain holy German art.") Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Act III, Scene 5, Piano-Vocal score (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1970), 564. Upon the return of this work to the repertoire in 1945, the management, still wary about the perceived nationalism and anti-German sentiment, excised this speech in what would be known as the Leinsdorf cuts, named after conductor Erich Leinsdorf, who introduced the cuts just prior to the war.

⁴ The population of New York City (at 515,547 in 1850, according to Census Bureau data) saw a huge influx – a 118% increase – of German immigrants between then and 1890. In 1890 German-born New Yorkers formed the largest foreign-born "ethnic" group at 210,723 out of a total population of 1,515,301. This influx peaked in 1900 with the German-born population at 324,224 out of a total population of 3,437,202 (note that the 1900 Census is the first after the consolidation of New York City). See Ira Rosenwaike, *Population History of New York City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 43; Edward G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1,111. To satisfy the demand for German entertainment and to counter deficits incurred during the 1882/1883 inaugural season under Henry Abby, the Met initiated a policy of "German-only" repertoire from the 1884/1885 season through that of 1890/1891. In fact, productions of German operas proved to be the Met's most cost-effective productions until the middle of the twentieth century. The German-only seasons provided the Met with the success necessary to outlast its main competitor at the Academy of Music. The Met's reputation as the main venue for Richard

continued growth in popularity of Wagner coincided with the rising success of the Met. Aiding the process was an expanding New York press, always willing to fuel the fires of Wagner's popularity and controversy. Indeed, the histories of American Wagnerism, the Met, and New York City are intertwined. Within the United States, the Wagner cult of the turn of the twentieth century could only have occurred in New York, and his music dramas quickly became and remained a staple of the Met and a favorite of New York audiences. This success then fanned out to smaller operas houses in the city (most of which folded long ago).⁵ But just as the shifting socio-economic fabric of the city – caused by changing demographics⁶ and fluctuating tastes – had an impact upon the Met, so the nature of Wagnerism shifted as well, in part (to take the long view) as a result of two World Wars. The Wagner-Met-New York relationship changed irrevocably; and it is the shifting interrelationships among these three histories that this dissertation examines.

Wagner's operas remained intact even after the company switched to a broader repertoire. See Chapter 1 for a full discussion.

⁵ New York City has a long history of opera, beginning with Lorenzo Da Ponte's Italian Opera House, built in 1833, for his New York Opera Company (which closed in 1835.) The Met, which was founded in 1883, had as its first main competitor the Academy of Music's American Opera Company (which presented the premieres of both Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Die Walküre*) and the Angelo Opera Company. The Academy of Music stopped presenting opera in 1886 owing to the success of the Met at attracting and keeping the upper echelons of New York society. The next major competitor consisted of Oscar Hammerstein's numerous ventures. His initial foray into opera involved the short-lived Manhattan Opera House in 1893, which theatre was soon used for variety shows. Another attempt involved the Philadelphia Opera House. This venture lasted from 1906 through 1910. In the end, Oscar Hammerstein could not maintain the high cost of production, and a group of stockholders at the Met led by Otto Kahn and E.T. Stotesbury as the front-man offered Hammerstein \$1.2 million buyout with the stipulation that he would not produce opera in New York City, Boston, Chicago, or Philadelphia for ten years. Other companies that appeared and folded quickly were the Rudolf Christians Corporation in 1919 and the Star Opera Company in that same year. See "Hammerstein Quits Opera: Turns Over His Rights, Contracts with Singers, and Philadelphia House to E.T. Stotesbury," *New York Times*, April 28, 1910, 1; "Ask Hylan to Stop German Opera," *New York Times*, March 8, 1919, 1; "Star Opera Company Fails," *New York Times*, November 25, 1919, 24. See Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1966: A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 222.

⁶ See Rosenwaik, *Population History of New York City*, and Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, both of which utilize information from both the United States Census Bureau and the Bureau of Immigration, as it was then called.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (premiered in Munich, 1868) is unique among the operas of Richard Wagner. Not only is it set within an identified historical time and place, sixteenth-century Nuremberg, and with flesh-and-bones characters, Hans Sachs among others, but it projects all of this forward, where it stood as one of Hitler's favorite operas, the one that Joseph Goebbels called "the incarnation of our [Germany's] national identity."⁷ Although *Die Meistersinger* had been employed to varying degrees by both the Wilhelmine Reich and the Weimar Republic as the embodiment of "German" ideals, it was the appropriation of the opera by the Third Reich that left an indelible mark on its reception, particularly in the United States. This association was further complicated by the warm relationship between Hitler and the Wagner family. Indeed, the image of Hitler addressing the throngs from the balcony of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth remains pervasive even today.⁸ Resonating in Hitler was Wagner's love of the *Volk* and fondness for mythologizing German history. Specific to *Die Meistersinger* is the myth of sixteenth-century Nuremberg, the idealized presentation of the *Volk*, and the portrayal of German art as supreme.

Though one can hardly escape the *Meistersinger*-Third Reich connection, the particular focus of this dissertation—and one that has not been addressed until now—will

⁷ Goebbels made this proclamation in a radio address during the first intermission of *Die Meistersinger* at the 1933 Bayreuth Festival (a particularly important festival given that it was the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death); quoted after Thomas Grey, "Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as National German Opera (1868-1945)," in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 95. See also Helmut Strauss, "Hitler's Bayreuth—The Bayreuth Festival during the 'Third Reich'," paper presented at the New School University, New York, 2004; and Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 165.

⁸ Hitler faithfully attended the Bayreuth festival each year from 1933 through 1940. At the start of the 1933 festival, he addressed the nation via radio broadcast, and he delivered speeches at the start of the 1936 and 1940 festivals. See Brigitte Hamann, *Winifred Wagner: A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth*, trans. Alec Bance (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2005 – originally published as *Winifred Wagner oder Hitlers Bayreuth* [Munich: Piper Verlag, 2002]).

be the politics of the work in New York City and, more specifically, at the Met. (It does occasionally venture out into other parts of the country.) Further, it deals with three New York-centric questions: (1) how did the issues of the opera's "German-ness" resound with the New York opera-goers? (2) how were these issues portrayed in the press? and (3) how did these issues affect its life at the Met?

The study is divided into two parts. Part I deals with the period from the mid-nineteenth century through World War I. Chapter 1 examines the Wagner phenomenon in the United States from the mid 1850s and the fate of *Die Meistersinger* in particular through the eve of World War I. Chapter 2 then looks at the war years themselves. It was during these years that the precedent for cancelling a politically questionable opera was established. Calls to cancel all German opera had begun with the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915. Yet despite the ever-growing anti-German sentiment and a vituperative press decrying all things German, the management of the Met deferred any decision to alter the repertoire until America's entry into the war in 1917. In the end, the Met imposed a blanket-like ban on all German-language operas.

Part II deals almost entirely with *Die Meistersinger* and the Met during the years leading up to, during, and just after World War II. Chapter 3 begins with the 1930s in order to provide a picture of the situation leading up to World War II. These pre-war years will provide a context against which the sudden cancellation of *Die Meistersinger* will seem questionable, perhaps even astounding. Specifically at issue is this: though the association of *Die Meistersinger* with Nazi Germany came into being immediately upon Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the management of the Met did not ban the opera until

after the final performance of the 1939/1940 season.⁹ Had the Met been truly concerned with the opera's nationalistic content and Nazi association, one would think that its management would have pulled the opera earlier. What, then, were the mitigating circumstances that led to the delay? And what finally pushed the Met into cancelling the opera? I will consider the motivations behind these decisions and the politics involved in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Also at issue, and one of the more sinister variables of the opera, is the question of its anti-Semitism, which, though treated to some extent in Chapter 4, erupted mostly after the war.

A separate, yet relevant, issue taken up in Chapter 5 involves pre- and post-war productions of *Die Meistersinger*. Already in the years just before the war, the Met had begun to "sanitize" the opera, finding it prudent to excise those sections of Hans Sachs's Act III, Scene 5 speech heralding German art.¹⁰ For its 1945 revival, the Met borrowed a production from the Chicago Lyric Opera, retained those "cuts," and added new ones, including sections of Walther's Act III, Scene 5 prize song. Chapter 5 also provides information about the Wagner singers during the war. While *Die Meistersinger* was banned, other Wagner works were performed, and there was still a demand for Wagnerian singers. Most of these singers were European, predominantly German and Scandinavian. Yet owing to difficult, if not impossible travel logistics and/or other war-related social and political factors, many of these European singers were unavailable during the war. Thus there was an increase in the number of American Wagner singers

⁹ This timing seems especially odd since *Die Meistersinger* was the choice for the Met's showpiece during the 1939 New York World's Fair.

¹⁰ The most notable line, "die heilige deutsche Kunst" ("The most holy German art"), was absent in the productions of both 1939 and 1945. See Olin Downes, "Leinsdorf Directs Wagnerian Opera," *New York Times*, 3 December 1939, 58; Downes, "Full House Hears Meistersinger: Performance at Met, Conducted by George Szell, Features Fine Ensemble," *New York Times*, 11 February 1945, 41.

which led to a sense that the guard had changed. Whereas the final performance in 1940 featured beloved artists in the twilight of their career (many, of whom, most notably Friederich Schorr, retired during the war), the cast of the 1945 revival consisted of many neophyte Wagnerians.

Chapter 6 addresses the Met's decision to ban the opera. More specifically, this chapter examines what happens when art and politics collide. It will expose the Met's (and Edward Johnson's) duplicity and disconnect in the way it dealt with the *Die Meistersinger* problem, for while Johnson maintained his public stance of art-above-all-else, his actions behind the scene went in another direction.

Finally, the Conclusion addresses one last question, that of rehabilitation. Does *Die Meistersinger*—and, by extension, Richard Wagner in general—need rehabilitation for twenty-first-century America? Are we ready to discuss *Die Meistersinger* and Wagner without a sidebar of World War II-related disclaimers? Perhaps a thorough study of the politics of World War II, Wagner, and *Die Meistersinger* is a first step towards this rehabilitation.

WAGNER SCHOLARSHIP: *DIE MEISTERSINGER* AND ANTI-SEMITISM

An Overview

The body of Wagner scholarship is vast. Yet there is surprisingly little in terms of reception studies, especially with respect to the United States. For our purposes, there are two exceptions: Joseph Horowitz's *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), a detailed account of the pre-1900 Wagner cult in New York City, and Harold Briggs's dissertation, "Richard Wagner and American

Music-Literary Activity from 1850 to 1920,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1989), concerning the relationship between Wagner and New York press during that period. In addition, my own thesis for the Master of Arts degree, entitled “Wagner Reception at the Met in the War Climate of New York City, 1916-1920,” (Brooklyn College, The City University of New York, 2004), deals with the subject in relation to New York and the World War I. And with a broader lens, the most recent edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, edited by Thomas Grey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), addresses the question of Wagner and the Third Reich, as well as current perspectives on criticism and analysis.

There have been a number of recent studies that deal specifically with the reception of *Die Meistersinger*. One of the most important of these is the interdisciplinary volume *Wagner’s Die Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation*, edited by Nicholas Vazsonyi (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), while another notable study is Lydia Goehr’s *The Quest for Voice: On Music and the Limits of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), which looks at *Die Meistersinger* from a philosophical point of view.

Recently, the study of the Wagner/Third Reich connection has come to the forefront, the watershed moment being the publication of Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (New York: Random House, 1996). Though not pertaining directly to Richard Wagner (he is cited only once),¹¹ Goldhagen’s study ushered in a new era of Wagner-Third Reich-Holocaust research (not to mention renewing the contentious

¹¹ Goldhagen quotes Wagner, “der plastische Dämon des Verfalls der Menschheit” (“the plastic demon of the decay of humanity”), though he does not provide a citation for it (398). The quote is from the 1881 essay “Erkenne dich selbst,” *Bayreuther Blätter* (February-March, 1881). The essay was reissued in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York: Broude Bros., 1966; reprinted from the original edition of 1892-1899), vol. 6, 264-74.

Sonderweg discussions).¹² The surge in studies has been tremendous. Of these, one of the more controversial is *Wagner's Hitler* by Joachim Koehler (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), which places Hitler at the end of an historical continuum beginning with Wagner and asserts a *Sonderweg*-like inevitability of Hitler growing out of Wagner. Although certainly thought-provoking, Koehler's study has been questioned by some for its lack of scholarly methodology. These challenges notwithstanding, there has been a recent spate of similarly themed books, among them Christopher Nicholson's *Richard and Adolf* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2007).

Paradoxes, Problems, and Polarizing Effects

It is safe to say that camps "pro and contra Wagner" (to borrow Thomas Mann's phrase) in the United States began with the publication of Wagner's essay on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in *Dwight's Journal of Music* in 1853.¹³ At the core of the controversy were Wagner's theories about art and its place within (or without) society. The contentious nature of the discourse continues to the present day, even if with a shift of topics. The present discourse is quite often filled with vitriol, a great amount of which

¹² The *Sonderweg* theory asserts that both German anti-Semitism and the Holocaust were inevitable. It posits that, beginning with Martin Luther and continuing through Hitler, there existed a thread of anti-Semitism that inevitably resulted in the Holocaust. It is a highly controversial and contested theory. This theory forms the basis of some of the more famous studies, including William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther To Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (London: Harrap, 1946) and, of course, William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960).

¹³ Richard Wagner, "Programme to the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven," *Dwight's Journal of Music* II (February 5, 1853), 137-39. Between 1853 and the magazine's demise in 1881, John Sullivan Dwight published all of Wagner's prose works in translation, along with criticism pertaining to him. During the course of this period, his personal views on both Wagner and his music shifted from one of enthusiasm to one of disdain. See Ora Frishberg Saloman, "Dwight and Perkins on Wagner: A Controversy within the American Cultivated Tradition, 1852-1854," *Music and Civilization: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, ed. Edmond Strainchamps, Maria Rika Maniates, and Christopher Hatch (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 78-92.

revolves around the issue of Wagner's anti-Semitism. This issue is a dizzying paradox. Though Wagner himself was admittedly anti-Semitic, there is the question of whether or not that attitude can be found in his music dramas. This is Wagner scholarship at its most polarizing: there are those who believe that the music dramas are anti-Semitic and those who think that Wagner compartmentalized his anti-Semitism and kept it out of his art. A prominent proponent for the former view is Marc A. Weiner whose *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) asserts that, through physicalizing stereotypes, Wagner imbued his operas with anti-Semitic "codes" discernable to nineteenth-century audiences. In a manner that Thomas Grey referred to as using Wagner's 1850 essay *Das Judenthum in der Musik* as a point of departure,¹⁴ Weiner projects Semitic characteristics onto characters that he perceives to be Jewish using such devices as gait, posture, smell, voice, and language.¹⁵

Other scholars who have argued in favor of the anti-Semitism inherent in Wagner's music dramas include Robert Gutman, Paul Lawrence Rose, Barry Millington, Stewart Spencer, and David Levin.¹⁶ One of the more nuanced studies is that by Paul Lawrence Rose, who places Wagner's anti-Semitism in its nineteenth-century context, that is, of an extant, institutionalized anti-Semitism that was evident throughout Europe

¹⁴ Thomas Grey, "Bodies of Evidence," review of *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination*, by Marc A. Weiner, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2 (July, 1996): 187.

¹⁵ Among Wagner's characters in whom Weiner, apparently borrowing from Theodor Adorno (see note 23 below), sees those traits are Sixtus Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*, Alberich and Mime in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and Kundry in *Parsifal*.

¹⁶ Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1968); Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Barry Millington, "Nuremburg Trial: Is There Anti-Semitism in *Die Meistersinger*?" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3 (1991), 247-60; Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, *Wagner's "Ring of the Nibelung": A Companion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); David J. Levin, *Richard Wagner, Fritz Lang, and the Nibelungen: The Dramaturgy of Disavowal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

and that grew out of the writings of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814)¹⁷ and the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* of Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau (1816-1882).¹⁸ On the opposing side are the indignant deniers, including Carl Dahlhaus, Martin Gergor-Dellis, Dieter Borchmeyer, Jakob Katz, Michael Tanner, and Daniel Barenboim.¹⁹ That each group is convinced of its own infallibility goes without saying.

A brief overview of the historiography of Wagner's anti-Semitism calls for discussion. The contentious discourse about the subject began almost immediately upon the composer's death. One can trace its origin to the official newspaper of the Bayreuth Festival, the *Bayreuther Blätter*.²⁰ Edited by Hans von Wolzogen, the *Blätter* assumed a strongly nationalistic and anti-Semitic stance, and was largely responsible for the initial dissemination of the dogma of Wagner's anti-Semitism. Upon Wagner's death, the composer's family gave both von Wolzogen, himself a strong German nationalist and an

¹⁷ Of Fichte's anti-Semitic and nationalistic writings, two are notable: "Beiträge zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die Französische Revolution," *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* ed. Lauth Reinhard, Hans Gliwitzky, and Hans Jacob, vol. 1, *Werke 1791-1794* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1962), in which he discusses the impossibility of Jewish "civil rights," and the 1807-1808 Berlin lectures, *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. R.F. Jones and G.H. Turnbull (Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1922), where he outlines his opposition to the Jews.

¹⁸ Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 4 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1852). One should note that Wagner himself repudiated the findings of Gobineau.

¹⁹ Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Carl Dahlhaus and John Deathridge, *The New Grove Wagner* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Wagnerian Self-Fashioning: The Case of Adolf Hitler," *New German Critique* 101 (Summer, 2007), 95-114; further on Vaget, see below; Martin Gregor-Dellis, *Richard Wagner, His Life, His Work, His Century*, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983); Dieter Borchmeyer, Ami Maayani, Susanne Vill, *Richard Wagner und die Juden* (Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2000); Jakob Katz, *The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1986); Michael Tanner, *Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Daniel Barenboim, "Germans, Jews, and Music," *The New York Review of Books* (March 29, 2001), 50-51; Daniel Barenboim and Edward W. Said, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations of Music and Society* (New York: Random House, 2002).

²⁰ Founded in 1881, the *Blätter* initially published Wagner's substantial essays, including "Religion and Art" and "Heroism and Christianity."

outspoken anti-Semite, and the journal free reign. The idea of a Bayreuth-sponsored, Wagnerian anti-Semitism was furthered by Houston Stewart Chamberlain (Richard Wagner's son-in-law and close companion of his widow), who extolled the ideas of Wagner's nationalism and anti-Semitism (largely to validate his own) in his biography of the composer and in a Forward to a collection of the composer's prose.²¹ Another important contributor to the idea of Wagner's nationalism was Alfred Lorenz, who notoriously sympathized with the Third Reich and wrote his massive *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner* (1924-1933) as the *sine qua non* of Wagnerian analysis. Lorenz plays heavily upon the idea of Wagner's music dramas as an inevitable extension of a tradition of German art dating back to the Middle Ages. And though Lorenz was initially viewed as *the* Wagner authority, post-War Wagner criticism has been skeptical of his work.²²

The 1950s marked the beginning an important era in Wagner criticism. There was a strong quest to "sanitize" Wagner in terms of both performance and scholarship. Writing at a time when the world was seeking answers to the questions of fascism, Theodor Adorno was seeking an answer to the Third Reich's appropriation of Wagner. In his *Versuch über Wagner* (published in 1952 but written in 1937-1938), Adorno famously stated, "all of the rejects of Wagner's works are caricatures of Jews."²³ And as

²¹ This edition has come under scrutiny owing to Chamberlain's "interpretation" or full-scale manipulation of Wagner's correspondence. See Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner*, trans. G. Ainslie Hight (London: J.M. Dent, 1900); *Richard Wagner: Auswahl seiner Schriften*, ed. Felix Groß with a Forward by Houston Stewart Chamberlain (Leipzig: Insel Verlag und C.F.W. Siegel, 1910).

²² In his *Analyzing Wagner's Operas: Alfred Lorenz and German Nationalist Ideology* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), Stephen McClatchie argues for a re-engagement with Lorenz's analysis.

²³ On the identity of the "rejects," see note 15, above. Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), 13.

Nicholas Vazsonyi has noted in his *Wagner's Meistersinger*, Adorno's statement became the fulcrum around which later Wagner criticism revolves, as later generations of scholars performed (and continue to perform) literary and scholarly gymnastics to support or deny Adorno's claim.

One dispute in particular merits special attention: that between Paul Lawrence Rose and Hans Rudolf Vaget in the pages of the journal *The German Quarterly*.²⁴ One of the central tenets in Rose's *Wagner: Race and Revolution* is the observation that Wagner's anti-Semitism was a necessary part of his own German-ness: "Wagner needed an analysis of Jewishness to complete his definition of Germaness."²⁵ Furthermore, according to Rose, there is an inherent anti-Semitism in *Die Meistersinger*: "Viewed [. . .] in the context of Wagner's 'German politics' of the 1860s, the political meaning of *Die Meistersinger* is unmistakable," that is, it is anti-Semitic.²⁶ In his review of Rose's book, Vaget states of Rose's insight into *Die Meistersinger*: "With this assessment, he leaves behind not only Adorno, but also Barry Millington, the two authors from whom he takes most of his clues—without, however, paying much heed to their handling of the matter, which is considerably more circumspect than his."²⁷ Vaget adopts a vituperative tone and rails against Rose: "What Mr. Rose [. . .] has to say is not exactly new, but it is said with uncommon emotion and breathtaking radicalism."²⁸ Vaget thus condemns Rose and his radical tactics. Ironically, Vaget himself states that he is not refuting the anti-

²⁴ Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and Mr. Rose: Merkwürd'ger Fall!" *The German Quarterly* 66 (Spring, 1993), 222-226; William Rasch and Marc A. Weiner, "A Response to Hans Rudolf Vaget's 'Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and Mr. Rose'," *German Quarterly* 67 (Summer, 1994), 400-408.

²⁵ Rose, *Wagner, Race and Revolution*, 78.

²⁶ Rose, *Wagner, Race and Revolution*, 111.

²⁷ Vaget, "Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and Mr. Rose," 222.

²⁸ Vaget, "Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and Mr. Rose," 224.

Semitism, but “what Mr. Rose makes of it.” It was then that William Rasch and Marc A. Weiner entered the fray, admonishing both Rose and especially Vaget for their contentious tone: “One might ask what could propel a scholar to engage in such an extended, and, at times, even strident, public denunciation of another scholar’s work. One answer, of course, could be the tenor of Rose’s own text, which is every bit as polemical as Vaget’s review.”²⁹ The Rasch/Weiner response openly criticizes Vaget for “hermetically sealing” Wagner’s anti-Semitism from his works, for not engaging the question of the anti-Semitism within the works, but arguing around it. This prompted a reply from Vaget, who, after bemoaning the lack of Wagner scholarship from the younger generation of scholars and applauding Rasch’s and Weiner’s bravery for their engagement with the issue, called into question Weiner’s blind reliance on Adorno. He then reiterated his argument of anti-Semitism being in the eye of beholder: that the “anti-Semitic subtext in *Die Meistersinger* is contingent upon a set of specific requirements governing the opera’s reception.”³⁰ These excerpts are unique neither in their breadth nor in their dynamism. They constitute but one small illustration of the tenor surrounding this topic, the contentious discourse that continues without resolution.

Finally, no discussion of the debate about Wagner, the Third Reich, and anti-Semitism is complete without a brief reference to one of its most controversial figures, the composer’s own great-grandson, Gottfried Wagner, who is a firm believer in the anti-Semitism of the music dramas. In his 1997 *Twilight of the Wagners*, he embraces the

²⁹ William Rasch and Marc A. Weiner, “A response to Hans Rudolf Vaget’s ‘Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and Mr. Rose’,” *The German Quarterly*, 67 (Summer, 1994), 400.

³⁰ Vaget, “Reply: A Response to Hans Rudolf Vaget’s ‘Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and Mr. Rose’,” 410. Vaget has since written a more balanced take on this issue engaging the ideas of Hitler’s aesthetics as the point of entry into the anti-Semitism in Wagner’s works. See “Wagnerian Self-Fashioning: The Case of Adolf Hitler,” *New German Critique*, 101 (Summer, 2007), 995-114.

Richard Wagner-to-Adolf Hitler continuum and unabashedly condemns the Wagner family (particularly his grandmother) for its close relationship with the Third Reich (the cover photograph for the book shows his father, Wolfgang, and his uncle Wieland arm in arm with their “Uncle Wolf,” their name for Hitler).³¹ In fact, Gottfried Wagner has vehemently criticized Wagner scholarship in general, stating that the current era is “a period of dark irrationalism,” a period “blinded by adulation for Wagner and the Romantic era.”³² In response, the Wagner family has presented a united front (an unusual move for a family fraught with decades of deep conflict and in-fighting) and has openly and officially denounced him.³³ Like-minded scholars see him as an inconvenience, and they frequently criticize him for his bitter tenor and his overt contempt for those who disagree with his assertions. He stands as a singular figure, unique for his vehemence within a crowd that is well-known for theirs.

In the end, the scholarship surrounding Wagner’s anti-Semitism raises as many questions as it answers, particularly in the United States. Moreover, certain questions have hardly been asked. Among these is the issue of the audience’s role. Is the audience culpable in Wagner’s ideologies? Is the audience a willing participant or a passive recipient? Surely, the perception of Wagner’s ideologies will be informed by the

³¹ Gottfried Wagner, *Twilight of the Wagners: The Unveiling of a Family’s Legacy*, trans. Della Coulig (London: St. Martin’s Press, 2000; originally published Cologne: Keipenheuer & Witsch, 1997).

³² Gottfried Wagner, “On the Need to Debate Richard Wagner in Open Society: How to Confront Wagner Today beyond Glorification and Condemnation,” in *Richard Wagner for the New Millennium*, ed. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Alex Lubert, and Gottfried Wagner (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 22.

³³ For further discussion of the in-fighting within the Wagner family, much of it revolving around control of the Bayreuth Festival, see Nike Wagner, *The Wagners: The Dramas of a Musical Dynasty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); see also Jonathan Carr, *The Wagner Clan: The Saga of Germany’s Most Illustrious and Infamous Family* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), which provides a more objective and thorough history of the family after the composer’s death.

prejudices of the audience—scholars included—and the audience’s perception will always be a mirror of society at any given point in time. This issue is dynamic in that there are aspects of perception that are static and there are those that are evolving. There are facets of *Die Meistersinger* that already resounded with American audiences upon its American premiere in 1886, and there are facets of the music drama that became more poignant when viewed through the tumultuous prism of the twentieth century. And for *Die Meistersinger*, the prism was never more tumultuous than during the country’s participation in the twentieth century’s two World Wars.

PART I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WAGNER AND

DIE MEISTERSINGER

IN THE UNITED STATES THROUGH WORLD WAR I

CHAPTER 1

WAGNER IN AMERICA TO WORLD WAR I

To understand American Wagnerism in its fullest context, especially as it will pertain to *Die Meistersinger* around the time of World War II, we must back up to mid-nineteenth-century America, when the distinct tenor and the equally distinct verbiage of the pro-and-contra-Wagner views began to take root. Put another way, the conflicts that play out in the reception of Wagner in New York—our main focus—had their formation in the nineteenth century. Further, the conflicts over *Die Meistersinger* in particular that explode with the opera's appropriation by the Third Reich had its beginnings with the ascent (and subsequent downfall) of the so-called Wagner cult of the late nineteenth century. This chapter will examine the various factors that contributed to the meteoric rise of American Wagnerism; they include the initial reception in the press, the shifting demographics of fin-de-siècle New York City, the contribution of the Metropolitan Opera and its patrons, and the early acolytes and detractors who established a dialectic that would continue well into the twentieth century. Finally, the chapter will examine *Die Meistersinger* and its specific place within this early context.

INITIAL CRITICISM AND REVIEWS

The binary dialectic that signifies much of Wagner discourse had its roots in the press reception of both his music and, especially, his prose essays beginning in the 1850s.

Even before the music of Wagner reached these shores, it was upon Wagner's prose that the early press focused, with many of the early articles being either the work of foreign correspondents or reprints from the European press. And already, the divergent

dialectic was in place. An unsigned article that was a digest of an article originally appearing in *La Gazette musicale* and was reprinted in *The New York Daily Times* (the predecessor of *The New York Times*) reads:

[. . .] at present we may say that Richard Wagner is neither more nor less than one of those men who anticipate a new phase in art; who represent the end of an old period of art, but not the beginning of a new one. [. . .] Whenever, in past time, art has been about to make a forward step, there have been those who, by their powers of reflection and critical ability, have heralded and preluded its approach. Wagner is such a man, and, as such, he will most certainly not be forgotten by the future historians.¹

A review of Wagner's *Oper und Drama* in the *International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* presented an opposing view when it expressed its disdain for Wagner's revolutionary views of opera. With great contempt, the reviewer stated, "He no longer professes to write operas, but music dramas."² Thus, the tone was established early. And once the critical focus shifted from Wagner's prose to his music, the arguments concerning Wagner begin to polarize even further.

WAGNER'S MUSIC AND THE NEW YORK PRESS

Although the journalistic spotlight may have fallen mainly on Wagner's prose, the music too came into focus. One of the first reviews to deal specifically with Wagner's music appears in a 26 June 1855, *New York Daily Times* article concerning a German music festival. The festival featured various German music societies and had been heavily advertised in both the *New-York Tribune* and the *New York Daily Times*.³ The article credits Dr. Carl Bergmann with introducing Wagner's music to New York

¹ "Richard Wagner," *New-York Daily Times*, 9 March 1855, 2. Original publication date of the article in *La Gazette musicale* is not indicated.

² "Oper und Drama," *International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* 5 (April 1852): 553.

³ "Amusements," *New-York Tribune*, 25 June 1855, 1; "The Great German Festival," *New-York Daily Times*, 22 June 1855, 4.

audiences. Bergmann had initially conducted the finale from *Tannhäuser* in 1852 in Boston, but for this festival he offered pieces from both *Rienzi* and *Lohengrin*. The article then turns caustic: “It is coarse-grained humbug, nevertheless and does not say much for the purity of the future—of which Mr. Wagner is the especial prophet.”⁴ Conversely, Richard Storrs Willis, editor of the *New York Musical World*, came down strongly in favor of Wagner:

It may be here remarked, in connection with this subject, that a new school of music is now forming in Germany, whose main object is to give the words greater prominence, and raise poetry from the disgrace into which it has fallen in its association with opera. This school is headed by Richard Wagner and actively espoused by Liszt, to whom its already brilliant success is mainly to be ascribed. Wagner is a political refugee, living in Switzerland: a man of rare genius, musical and poetic. He furnishes the text as well as the music of his operas, and learned Germany is divided on the question, whether he shines more as a poet or as a composer. His *Tannhäuser* has already had great success, although opposed, as are all his works, by the various governments of Germany, for the author’s political-opinions sake, and also by adherents by the old school of opera.⁵

This passage is especially interesting as it begins to establish specific identities for the opposing sides in the Wagner debate: “learned Germany” for the supporters, stodgy and old traditionalists for the decriers. Indeed, a fair amount of the Wagnerian discourse focuses more upon the identity of those groups than upon the composer or his music. What we have is a pseudo-archetype for the later Wagner combatants. On the one hand, there are the devotees who are identified by their educated embrace of “newer” philosophies regarding music, art, and politics; on the other, we have the antagonists who tend to be portrayed by their conservatism, their traditionalism, and by their rejection of the “newer” philosophies (this, of course, is one of the main themes of *Die Meistersinger*). We see the beginnings of this dichotomy played out in the press in the

⁴ “The German Festival,” *New-York Daily Times*, 26 June 1855, 1.

⁵ Richard Storrs Willis, “Richard Wagner,” *New York Musical World* 15 (31 March 1855): 145.

1850s. It gains momentum in the 1860s and 1870s, continues through the Wagner “Golden” Age of *fin de siècle* New York, and extends past the turn of the century into World War I. Then something unforeseen happens. After World War I there is a paradigmatic shift in the identity of these participating groups. Rather than a “new” versus “old” or “progressive” versus “conservative” dialectic, there appears an aspect of “good” versus “bad.” And with the appropriation of Wagner’s music by the Third Reich, his supporters are now identified—and at times are indeed synonymous—with evil. This “guilt by association” is one of the more pernicious aspects of Wagnerism, particularly in America.

To return to the nineteenth century: during the 1860s, the discourse continued, but pertained more directly to the music. New orchestral snippets (the most popular extracts being the overtures to *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*) were appearing more frequently, and the whole of *Tannhäuser* was, as noted above, presented in 1859. It was subject to great dissection. The music critic for the *New-York Tribune* summed things up in 1866 as follows:

This opera has been more talked about, written about, criticized, abused and defended, has been more successful here and condemned there, has passed through more vicissitudes than any other opera ever produced in public.⁶

There was also a sense of self-awareness: “This Wagner controversy has been the most recent exemplification of musical sectarianism in the history of art.”⁷ The use of the word “sectarianism” is one that will appear again and again during the course of Wagner reception. It is an apt description for a phenomenon that involves warring groups.

⁶ “German Opera,” *New-York Tribune*, 27 April 1866, 4.

⁷ “Richard Wagner, Literary and Musical Labors of ‘Lyric Feuds’,” *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* 88 (July 1867): 143.

Indeed, one of the running journalistic tropes that began in the 1860s is the near-religious tone that enters the discussion.

The discourse reached a distinct peak in the 1870s, just before the so-called Wagnerian Golden Age: it was then that a number of luminaries of literature and music began to enter the fray. Moreover, there seemed to be a degree of self-consciousness among the participants, as if they knew that they were part of a grander debate. Further, the parties observed that the debate itself had become larger than the subject matter. John Knowles Paine (1839-1906) and Richard Grant White (1822-1885) were among those whose public rants were echoed in many publications. With a great amount of prescience, Paine, the esteemed Harvard music professor, stated in his twenty-eight page article in the *North American Review*: “The history of art has never witnessed a more bitter and protracted strife of opinion than now reigns in the musical world.” Paine interpreted Wagner’s music as an extension of his involvement in the failed revolution of 1848 and took personal offence at Wagner’s rejection of conventional religious thought and, by extension, his theories of music.⁸

Richard Grant White (father of the architect Stanford White) was another high-profile detractor of Wagner. A Shakespeare scholar, Civil War commentator, and *New York Times* columnist, White, like Paine, found Wagner’s theories on the importance of the text to be preposterous. Writing for the *Galaxy* (precursor of the *Atlantic Monthly*),

⁸ There may have been politics at play as well. Paine was an American composer at a time when American composers were still seen as subordinate to their European counterparts, specifically those of Germany. On Wagner’s political theories, Paine stated, “Wagner’s wholesale denunciation of modern civilization, his declaration that our present religion and social and political life must be completely revolutionized before his ideal work of art can be appreciated, is so far removed from any possibility of realization that we may dismiss the subject as the vagary of a wild dreamer.” John Knowles Paine, “Richard Wagner’s Operas,” *North American Review* 116 (April 1873): 217.

White stated: “But Wagner has yet shown no evidence of musical genius, only of musical skill and constructiveness. He has uttered no musical thought that has any value in itself; and he is too old now for the day-spring of that beauty to dawn upon him.”⁹

On the other side are Franz Hueffer (1845-1889) and George T. Ferris (1840-?), both of whom typify the pious fervor common among Wagner’s adherents. Hueffner illustrates this tone when he states in *Scribner’s Monthly* that Wagner’s music contained “intense moments of psychological truth.”¹⁰ Writing for *Appleton’s Journal*, Ferris further exemplifies this by stating:

He represents the rarest and choicest fruits of modern culture, not only as musician but as poet and philosopher; that he is the only example in the history of the art where massive scholarship and the power of subtle analysis have been united, in a preeminent degree, with great creative genius. [. . .] Those who are fortunate enough to witness the production of this sublime art-work will be able to realize in full what the union of poetry and music may be made under the best estate of both, so pregnantly hinted at by Shakespeare.¹¹

Thus the battle lines were drawn. Yet, of all the press coverage for Wagner during this early stage, none crystalizes this divide as does *Dwight’s Journal of Music*.

Dwight’s Journal of Music

The role of *Dwight’s Journal of Music* cannot be under-estimated, as it was *Dwight’s* that most thoroughly introduced Wagner to American readers. John Sullivan

⁹ It seems likely that White simply found fault with “modern” opera as a whole. In this article, he hails Rossini, stating that the aria “Di tanti palpiti” from *Tancredi* is “one of the beautiful existing examples of this purely dramatic style of music.” The irony in this statement is stunning, as Wagner uses this piece to lampoon Italian opera in *Die Meistersinger*. During the Act III entrance of the guilds, Wagner quotes this aria as the theme for the entrance of the Tailor’s guild. The implications of this are obvious and it displays both Wagner’s sense of humor and his lack of subtlety. Richard Grant White, “Richard Wagner and his Theory of Music,” *The Galaxy* 17 (June 1874): 782.

¹⁰ Franz Heuffer, “Richard Wagner,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 9 (November 1874): 84.

¹¹ George T. Ferris, “Portrait of Richard Wagner,” *Appleton’s Journal* 11 (3 January 1874): 432.

Dwight (1813-1893) founded *Dwight's Journal of Music* in 1852 and, as his biographer J. Wesley Thomas states: “[. . .] with it, Dwight established himself as almost a dictator of music in America and exerted an influence still clearly seen today upon our musical tastes.”¹²

As Dwight had been an early devotee to the German Romantics, his early kinship with Wagner seemed a natural fit. His aesthetic philosophy of text and music nearly matched Wagner's own. Dwight translated and published both Wagner's prose works and reviews of performances in Europe well before he began to deal with the music. Moreover, despite the embittered debate over Wagner's “Music of the Future” that would captivate nineteenth-century readers, *Dwight's* maintained a somewhat balanced stance, even in the face of John Sullivan Dwight's own shifting opinion about Wagner. Indeed, the bitter public battles that were a feature of American Wagnerism began in the pages of *Dwight's Journal of Music* as early as 1854 with the public dispute between Dwight and Charles Callahan Perkins (1823-1856).¹³ The tone of the quarrel was to presage the vituperative tone of the American Wagner reception to come.

In all, *Dwight's* approach to his own Wagner criticism was to present as much of the argument as possible without entering into the fray himself, usually by using

¹² See J. Wesley Thomas, “John Sullivan Dwight, A Translator of German Romanticism,” *American Literature* 21 (January 1950): 427-441. Dwight, an ordained Unitarian minister and Harvard alum, immersed himself in German Romanticism and established himself as a successful translator. It was with the German Romantic principle of music inherent within poetry and text, with the belief in the supremacy of impressions over concrete ideas, that Dwight had a particular affinity. He embraced Romanticism as a precursor to Transcendentalism and as such was an occasional contributor to the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*. Moreover, Dwight wrote frequently on German Romantic composers while in residence at the Transcendentalist Brook Farm, well before he established his own music periodical.

¹³ See Ora Frishberg Saloman, “Dwight and Perkins on Wagner: A Controversy within the American Cultivated Tradition, 1852-1854,” in *Music and Civilization: Essays in Honor of Paul Henry Lang*, ed. Edmond Strainchamps, Maria Rika Maniates, and Christopher Hatch (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 78-92.

Wagner's own prose. Yet his personal ambivalence finally extended to the pages of his *Journal*, especially in the 1870s, once the overall rhetoric in the general press began to escalate. Dwight, despite his initial acceptance of Wagner (if reservedly), had decided that Wagner was not the revolutionary and reformer that had been promised.¹⁴

In all, Dwight's ambivalence regarding Wagner eventually led to the downfall of his *Journal* and to his own subsequent loss of influence. Though still in its infancy, American Wagnerism had become too entrenched for John Sullivan Dwight to sway opinion away from Wagner. He could not convince America that Wagner's aesthetic theory was not right. He had lost the battle, and his *Journal of Music* folded in 1881, just as Wagner's reputation in America was beginning its ascent.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* NEW YORK CITY

To appreciate the meteoric rise of Wagnerism, it is necessary to explore the character of New York City during this time, from approximately 1850 to 1900. The timing of Wagnerism's arrival in New York (via his prose works in the early 1850s) was truly fortuitous, as the city was convulsing with great change. And if this initially contributed to the rise of Wagner's popularity, a later period of change led to its decline. Such shifts were also significant for the reception and perception of *Die Meistersinger*.

As of 1898 and the unification of the five separate boroughs into one city, the population had grown from approximately 744,323 in 1850 to 3,437,202,¹⁵ with much of

¹⁴ See Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).

¹⁵ This number is the sum of the populations of the five different boroughs based upon the 1850 census. The population of each borough was: New York County (Manhattan), 545,547; Kings County (Brooklyn), 138,882; Queens County, 36,833; Bronx County, approx. 8,000 (the Bronx was still considered to be part of Westchester County and roughly contained the towns West Chester, East Chester, Pelham, West Farms, and Yonkers); and Staten Island, 15,061. U.S.

the increase a result of immigration. With upheaval and unrest in Europe, émigrés flocked to this country, with New York City a major point of entry. Wagner's music and prose would fit nicely with the 1850 wave of German émigrés clamoring for entertainment in their own language. Indeed, a large force driving the initial mania for Wagner was demographic in nature, as the population of New York City changed at a rapid pace. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the city's demographics shifted from being predominantly of English and Dutch heritage to one made up of a diverse population of immigrants. And among the first of these groups to make itself a cultural force were the Germans.

The German Demographics

Wagner's popularity in the United States in general and New York in particular during the second half of the nineteenth century would have been improbable had it not been for the rapid influx of Germans into New York City.¹⁶ The migration was a result of political unrest caused by increasing inflation and unemployment, especially after the failed revolution of 1848, and Germans continued to be a dominant immigrant group until just after the turn of the twentieth century. One *New York Times* estimate indicated that as of 1850, there were roughly 657,000 German immigrants spread throughout the United States.¹⁷ To be sure, there had been a slight decline in the number of German immigrants during the late 1850s and early 1860s, but according to numbers published by the

Department of Commerce, 1850 Prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. U.S. Department of Commerce, 1900 Prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

¹⁶ As Germany was not a unified and independent country until 1871, the term German refers to Hessians, Bavarians, Rhinelanders, Pomeranians, and Westphalians.

¹⁷ "Washington: Immigration into the United States—Protection of Iron," *New-York Daily Times*, 14 May 1852, 1.

German Aid Society, the number of incoming Germans began to skyrocket again during the late 1860s into the 1870s owing to the unease of the Franco-Prussian War. This increase continued unabated until the mid-1880s, when Italians and Russian Jews became the dominant immigrant groups.¹⁸ In 1890 German-born New Yorkers formed the city's largest foreign-born group at 210,723 with the influx peaking in 1900 with a German-born population of 324,224.¹⁹

The Germans who came were employable skilled workers and craftsman, as well as businessmen. Indeed, when the revolution of 1848 failed:

[. . . E]xiled from Germany [were] many of the most learned writers and original thinkers of that country, most of whom found a refuge in the United States, where they were quietly settling themselves throughout the country, they betook themselves to various industrial occupations, many of them at complete variance with those they formerly pursued.²⁰

There is a sense in the press of the time that the Germans' self-sufficiency was a trait to be applauded, that their ability to acclimate quickly and be productive made them a welcomed group. There was not yet a vituperative tone concerning immigration; nor was there any widespread anti-German sentiment (not, at least, until World War I).

There are a few factors that contributed to this. First, a majority of the Germans used New York City as a point of arrival only and immediately moved on to other regions of

¹⁸ Untitled Article, *New-York Tribune*, 7 July 1869, 4; "German Immigration and Politics," *New-York Tribune*, 12 April 1880, 4; "Curious Facts about Immigration," *The Sun*, 5 January 1889, 1; "Italian Immigration," *The Sun*, 19 August 1892, 6; "Servants Becoming Scarce, Supply Cut Off by the Enforced Embargo on Immigration," *The Evening World*, 22 September 1892, 2; "The People that Come to Us," *The Sun*, 1 September 1897, 6; Cromwell Childe, "The Arrival of the Immigrant," *New York Times*, 14 August 1898, 10; S. von Sternberg, "German Immigration, the Phantom Peril," *North American Review* 182, (May 1906): 642.

¹⁹ Ira Rosenwaik, *Population History of New York City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 43; Edward G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1,111.

²⁰ "Politics of the German-American Press," *New-York Daily Times*, 18 February 1856, 4.

the United States, especially the West, the Mid-West, and Texarkana, where they were instrumental in settling these regions. As such, their productivity and contribution to the Western migration earned them a seat at the American table, if only a slightly lesser one.²¹

There is no interest to which we should keep a closer eye than those of our European immigrants. They come to us bringing nobler wealth than our California galleons—the wealth of earnest hearts, and busy hands, and far reaching enterprise. They are converting our Western wilderness into a rose garden. Their labor is binding different sections and diverse interests more intimately together by railroads and other internal improvements. They are a part, an indispensable part, of our national economy.²²

Moreover, the Germans were well-received because, as a group, they tended to provide for themselves. They had constructed an effective infrastructure to aid incoming Germans. Thus such societies as the German Aid Society and the Germania Legal Aid Society provided a myriad of social services and were instrumental in the assimilation of the newly arrived Germans.²³ The Germans sought to quickly integrate themselves into American society (and many quickly referred to themselves as German-American—also using the phrase “hyphenates”). Though they maintained their culture, they quickly made

²¹ “The German Immigration,” *New-York Daily Times*, 6 January 1855, 4; Gerhard Friedrich, “Local Emigration,” Letter to the Editor, *New-York Tribune*, 27 February 1856, 6; Untitled Article, *The Sun*, 20 April 1879, 4; “Immigrants and Native Citizens, Interesting Statistics Furnished by the Census Bureau,” *New-York Tribune*, 12 March 1881, 1.

²² “American Citizenship,” *New York Daily Times*, 10 July 1852, 2. Indeed, the newly arrived were strongly encouraged to find employment outside of the city. In a Letter to the Editor of the *New-York Tribune*, Gerhard Friedrich writes that the German community at large should actively promote and provide financial assistance for those Germans to seek employment elsewhere. Gerhard Friedrich, *New-York Tribune*, 27 February 1856, 6.

²³ The German Aid Society was founded in 1781 and the Germania Legal Aid Society in 1876. Both provided services such as job and residential placement, language services, legal services, and financial assistance. The societies were run by prominent Germans and very often served as a link between the German community and the city itself. “The German Society,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 December 1859, 7; “A Society for German Catholics,” *New-York Tribune*, 4 November 1883, 13; “Claiming that He was Swindled,” *The Sun*, 11 January 1881, 1; “Mr. Ottendorfer Dead, Expires After a Long Illness—Active in Politics and Philanthropy,” *New-York Tribune*, 16 December 1900, 3.

themselves over as “Americans” and once arrived, they quickly chose the American way of life and abandoned any political loyalties to Germany.

One aspect of German culture that contributed to the popularity of Wagner’s music was the deeply entrenched German tradition of communal music making: specifically singing and singing societies. These societies were essential to the rise of Wagnerism, as it was these societies and their conductors who were the first to perform Wagner in New York City.

Singing and Music Societies

“In music, the Germans are all-predominant. The many music bands, the organists in the churches, the music teachers, etc. are principally composed of Germans.”²⁴

This quote from 1856 illustrates the contribution of Germans to the musical life of New York City, as they took great pains to maintain this aspect of their culture, of which these beloved music societies were a staple.²⁵ Indeed, the singing guild in *Die Meistersinger* is a wonderful illustration (albeit slightly mythologized) of this tradition. It was said that “wherever a dozen Germans are to be found, there will also be found a *Saengerfest* or musical club.”²⁶ These societies offered an artistic outlet as well as an important social function, providing their members with an instant community. Very often, these singing societies would work in tandem with the aid societies to speed the

²⁴ “Germans in America,” *New York Daily Times*, 9 October 1856, 4.

²⁵ Among the many singing societies were the Abt Schüler, Arion Quartette Club, Arminia, Mozart Verein, Germania, Harrugari Liederkrantz, Eichenkrantz, Beethoven Quartette, Schützen Quartette, Badescher Mannerchor, Ulh Quartette, Cordhalia, Sangerlust, Rheinschar Sangerband, Social Reform Liedertafel, Fidelia Quartette Club, and Uhlband. “Scenes at the Pier,” *New-York Tribune*, 14 March 1879, 1.

²⁶ “The Saengerfest: Grand German Demonstration and Unique Demonstration Took Place,” *New-York Daily Times*, 25 June 1855, 1.

process of assimilation. They were a backbone of German-American culture.

The most respected of the singing societies was the Liederkrantz Society. It was an influential organization in matters both musical and civic. Founded in 1784, the Liederkrantz was especially active in fostering a new generation of German musicians. Of the German music tradition, a *Times* writer stated: “Music, the most penetrating and humanizing of arts, owns Germany for her cradle and her home, and has given not only to German masters her deepest inspiration, but to the German population her broadest endowment.”²⁷ Moreover, the Liederkrantz would be the chorus of choice for German operas in the city. Indeed, German opera was frequently performed under the auspices of these societies. In addition, there were often large-scale German music festivals that would feature these music societies performing new German music. In fact, before it disbanded in 1855, Carl Bergmann’s Germania Society and their performances of Wagner overtures, initially *Tannhäuser* and then *Rienzi*, were a constant feature of these festivals.²⁸

The societies’ contribution to the German repertoire and, by extension, to the rise of the Wagner cult was immense. These societies formed a built-in audience that craved German music sung in its native tongue. This, in turn, fostered the rise of a German-dominated repertoire. And with Carl Bergmann’s American premiere of the finale from *Tannhäuser* in 1854, the circumstances for a phenomenon to start were in place. The fanaticism surrounding Wagner in New York City was a natural fit, one that expanded beyond the German community itself to take in a wider audience in the city. Yet, as will

²⁷ It had been the oldest and among the wealthiest, owning its own hall. Its members came from the German-American elite and included such pillars as Oswald Ottendorfer and William Steinway. “The Tenth National Saengerfest,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1867, 4.

²⁸ “Amusements,” *New-York Tribune*, 25 June 1855, 1.

be seen in later chapters, this early acceptance of Germans, German music, and the dominance it fostered would have serious ramifications for *Die Meistersinger* during the World Wars that marked the twentieth century.

ANTI-SEMITISM IN *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* NEW YORK

One of the more pernicious issues involved in any reading of *Die Meistersinger* is invariably the opera's perceived anti-Semitism. This issue tends to cast a long shadow, particularly as it pertains to the reception of the work at the time of World War II. Part of the main task of this study is to pose the question: did New York audiences of the 1940s distinguish any anti-Semitism, and, if so, was there any reaction? To answer this, we must first explore the context of anti-Semitism as it pertained to the Wagner cult circa 1900.

During the nineteenth century, the perception of Jews and the nature of anti-Semitism was different from the more blatant, race-based anti-Semitism of the early twentieth century, when it came to be marked by the 1915 revival of the Ku Klux Klan (allegedly emboldened by D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*), and the campaigns of Henry Ford, and the publication (or printing and distribution as funded by Henry Ford) in the United States of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* in the 1920s. The popular media during the second half of the nineteenth century provide one keen insight into the then-current attitudes. As outlined in Michael Dobkowski's "American Anti-Semitism: A Reinterpretation," there were many popular novels from this period that depicted specific stereotypes attributable to Jews: namely the Jew as pedantic, narrow-minded,

and bigoted—much the same as the stereotypes levied against the European Jewry.²⁹ The Jew as banker, merchant, and pawnbroker was a common trope, both here and abroad. Indeed, as we will note in Chapter 4, there are many similarities between this common portrayal of Jews and Wagner’s depiction of Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*. There were also periodicals that would regularly launch negative campaigns against Jews: the *Searchlight*, the *Fellowship Forum*, and the *American Standard*, with rhetoric becoming increasingly vitriolic towards the end of the nineteenth century.

This growing anti-Semitism (still more cultural than racial in nature) is interesting when considered in light of the immigration of Jews throughout the nineteenth century. The numbers of Jews living in the U.S. grew from 3,000 in 1820 to approximately 300,000 in 1890.³⁰ But it is not only the increase that contributes towards the shift in attitude. The earlier Jewish immigrants—mainly German speaking—settled very quickly and assimilated themselves easily into early American society. They were largely middle class and enjoyed the same aspects of the New York City as did everyone else. Of the anti-Semitism toward these earlier settlers, Irving Howe states in his *World of Our Fathers*, “For the most part, however, there was not yet any large-scale articulation of anti-Semitic prejudice, if only because the Jews did not yet figure in the popular imagination as a major force in American life.”³¹ And Lee J. Levinger had noted earlier:

²⁹ Some of these popular novels include the three books by Episcopal Father Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The Prince of the House of David* (1855), *Pillar of Fire* (1859), and *Throne of the Dead* (1860). Others include Lew Wallace’s *Ben Hur: A Tale of Christ* (1880), Mary Elizabeth Jennings’ *Asa of Bethlehem and his Household* (1895), Caroline Atwater’s *The Quiet Kind* (1896), Katherine Woods’ *John: A Tale of the Messiah* (1896), and Florence M. Kingsley’s *Stephen* (1896), *Paul* (1897), and *The Cross Triumphant* (1898). Michael N. Dobkowski, “American Anti-Semitism: A Reinterpretation,” *American Quarterly* 29 (Summer 1977): 166.

³⁰ At this time, the U.S. Census did not yet track religion or race, only country of origin. These numbers are estimates gathered by the Library of Congress.

³¹ Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 50.

“The Jew had not even attracted the special attention of the various anti-alien movements in American history, owing to his small numbers and frequent rapid Americanization.”³² This is not to say that there was not an unease regarding Jews, but simply that, as they had integrated themselves and had contributed to the greater society, they were minimally tolerated.

There were two main waves of Jewish immigration in the nineteenth century. The first was from 1840 to 1860, mainly from Central Europe. With this wave of immigration, the existing Jewish establishment (much like the existing German infrastructure, with which there was a fair amount of overlap) was instrumental in helping the newly arrived acclimate to America. The Jewish Aid Societies were, for the most part, able to help with employment and housing. With the larger wave, beginning in the 1880s, there was a shift to Eastern Europe, with the bulk coming from Russia.³³ This new group came to be viewed in a vastly different light than their predecessors. While earlier Jewish immigrants had been greeted with reluctant acceptance, this new group was viewed with outright hostility—even from within the Jewish community. An 1892 article in *The Sun* stated, “Within the last five years, and more especially within the last two years, the character of the Jewish immigration has changed greatly, and its volume has increased enormously. Instead of the enterprising spirits of the race, we are getting the feeble and incapable. Poverty and squalor distinguish them.”³⁴ Another writer states:

³² Lee J. Levinger, *Anti-Semitism in the United States: Its History and Causes* (New York: Bloch, 1925; reprint: Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 12.

³³ Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 29.

³⁴ “Sheeny,” *The Sun*, 6 March 1892, 6.

A change was wrought in American Judaism forty years ago by the influx of German Jews, who, thrifty and frugal, attained a high position in commercial and social life. [. . .] Today we stand at a new turning point. A tide of Jewish immigration from the Slavonic districts threatens to lower the moral and intellectual standard of American Judaism.³⁵

Another article in the *Sun* explains how even the existing Jewish community felt at odds with the newer group: “the ignorant, the superstitious, the outcast, the outlandish of nations, the slaves of centuries of bondage. [. . .] Those miserable and darkened Hebrews speaking a jargon peculiar to themselves.”³⁶ In all, there was a fear within the well-integrated German-Jewish society that the hostility directed towards the newly arrived would spread to them.

Another issue regarding the new influx was that the population was settling in the city instead of using it as a temporary stop. Moreover, they were less self-reliant than their predecessors. And though the Eastern European Jews quickly came to depend heavily on the already strained system of Jewish Aid Societies, employment was scarce and housing very limited. Many of the immigrants settled into the newly converted or constructed tenements. An 1892 article from *The Sun* states:

Formerly, the Jews were able to look after the immigrants of their own race, but of recent years the numbers have become so vast and of a quality so degraded that no philanthropy can prevent the danger to our society involved in a flood of humanity so turbid.³⁷

Further, this new community was less inclined to assimilate than their predecessors had been. And as they were a concentrated population living in awful conditions, they became an easy target for vitriol. In 1881, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society had been established specifically to deal with this influx, but with limited funds,

³⁵ “American Judaism,” *The Sun*, 22 October 1888, 5.

³⁶ “Jewish Anti-Semitism,” *The Sun*, 7 June 1894, 6.

³⁷ “The Negroes, the Chinamen, and European Immigrants,” *The Sun*, 28 September 1892, 6.

the ever-increasing population was doomed to poverty.³⁸ To this was added the panic that followed a cholera outbreak in 1892, which caused quarantines and calls to limit, if not outright block, further immigration.³⁹ The Aid societies were forced to turn to the general public for additional funding. Finally, and to begin veering toward *Die Meistersinger*, the anti-Semitism at the end of the century was especially poignant within the upper echelons of society, particularly among those who patronized the Metropolitan Opera.

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA: THE HOUSE THAT WAGNER BUILT

The initial success of *Die Meistersinger* in New York City was dependent upon the founding and initial success of the Metropolitan Opera Company. Conversely, it was the popularity of Wagner that drove the initial success of the Met. One of the curiosities when considering the Met's handling of *Die Meistersinger* in 1939 is that the history of American Wagnerism and the Met were utterly co-dependent. Neither would have triumphed were it not for the other. What follows briefly examines the early history of the Met with an eye towards the invaluable contribution of Wagner's works.

³⁸ In addition to the untenable conditions in Russia, part of the influx resulted from misguided philanthropy. The wealthy Austrian Jew, Baron Maurice von Hirsch, established a \$2.5 million fund to aid the Jews fleeing Russia. Similarly, the French banking family, the Rothschilds, had also established a fund. Unfortunately, this money only seemed to cover passage, not expenses for living in the city. To ameliorate this situation, Baron von Hirsch attempted to fund settlement colonies (there had been one established in New Jersey, though with minimal success, as there was one Argentina), but this promise seemed only to aggravate the situation. "The Jews," *The Sun*, 03 May 1891, 6; "The Russian Jews," *New York Times*, 27 July 1891, 4; "The Russian Refugees," *New York Times*, 21 December 1891, 4; "Russian Hebrew Farmers: A Successful Colony Established," *New York Times*, 12 November 1892, 9; "Restricting Immigration," *New York Times*, 27 November 1892, 4; Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 29.

³⁹ "Dangerous Immigration," *New York Times*, 25 July 1892, 7.

Early History

Among the changes in New York City during the course of the nineteenth century, few would have as great an impact upon American Wagnerism as the changing distribution of wealth. The Industrial Revolution brought with it fabulous wealth for a select few families. And those recipients of “new money” were willing to use their vast wealth and influence to invest in the culture of the city, much to the dismay and disdain of the old Knickerbocker society.⁴⁰ To a great extent, this was the circumstance under which the Met was founded.

For the upper echelons of Knickerbocker society, the Academy of Music had been the *de facto* operatic home since 1854. When the newly wealthy industrialists found themselves not welcome there, they simply opened a new opera house.⁴¹ Initiated by Cornelius “Commodore” Vanderbilt, the Metropolitan Opera House was founded in 1883 by a consortium of wealthy industrialists who had “made up their minds that the old Academy was ill adapted for the purposes and was far too downtown.”⁴² These initial investors comprised what would become known as the “Golden Horseshoe” and consisted of three groups: the Vanderbilts, the Morgans, and the remnants of the old Knickerbocker society that had migrated to the Met.⁴³ These groups formed a near-monolithic power structure that exerted a two-fold dominance: it functioned as a gate

⁴⁰ This term is generally used to describe the highest level of Manhattan society who could trace its heritage back to the original Dutch settlers. They generally thought of themselves as having been “old money” and therefore more highly regarded than the “new money” of the industrialists.

⁴¹ Apparently, the Metropolitan Opera owed its very existence to the whim of one such person. According to Lilli Lehmann (1848-1929): “As, on a particular evening, one of the millionairesses did not receive the box in which she intended to shine because another woman had anticipated her, the husband of the former took prompt action and caused the Metropolitan Opera House to rise.” Lilli Lehmann, *My Path Through Life* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1914), 5.

⁴² “The Proposed New Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 15 March 1882, 8.

⁴³ Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera: 1883-1966, A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 185.

against social interlopers and it acted as a governing (or meddling) force in the management. Eventually this power-group officially became the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company.⁴⁴

The Real Estate Company (also referred to as the Board of Directors) formed an unconventional business plan: they would “rent” the theater to production groups (pending their approval), rather than hiring and employing managers and other personnel. They waived any rental fee, keeping only their use of the boxes and taking the profits. Simply put, they were responsible for the premises, while the production company was responsible for the performances. Despite this, they could still dictate the program, since that depended upon the production group or the impresario they hired. This dysfunctional management model would set into motion conflicts that would come to a head, specifically regarding Wagner (and *Die Meistersinger*), in the next century.

The first production company was led by Henry Abbey (1846-1897) and Maurice Grau (1849-1903). The repertoire was light Italian and French fare for which Mr. Abbey secured prominent (and expensive) Italian signers. Unfortunately, Abbey and Grau misunderstood the tastes of the New York public. The season lost money, and they were not invited to return.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Membership was exclusive and subject to vote. In the minutes of the Real Estate Company’s meetings there are reports of people seeking entrance and being denied owing to lack of pedigree. Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan, Wednesday, May 13, 1914. Minute Book (13 May 1914 - 8 May 1918), Metropolitan Opera Archive.

⁴⁵ “Promise of the New Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 2 July 1883, 4; “Mr. Abbey’s New Enterprise,” *The Sun*, 31 December 1882, 3; “The Opera House Management,” *New-York Tribune*, 15 February 1884, 8; “Paying Dearly for Opera: Abbey to Retire and a Deficit for the Stockholders: the Directors of the New Opera-House Considering a Deficit of Nearly \$240,000 and a New Manager,” *New York Times* 14 February 1884, 5.

The German Tradition and I Maestri Cantori

For the next season, 1884-1885, the Board of Directors hired the Prussian-born, German-educated conductor Leopold Damrosch (1832-1885).⁴⁶ Damrosch was able to keep costs low by using his existing orchestra, The Symphony Society, and its affiliated chorus. Wisely, he decided he would tap into the expanding German population by exploiting mainly German repertoire, predominantly Wagner. He also retained some of the Italian and French fare from the Abbey season (*Rigoletto*, *Guillaume Tell*, *La Juive*), but had it performed in German, usually by less-expensive German singers. The season was successful, as the German population flocked to the Met, and this initiated the “German-only” seasons that would buttress the Met’s early success and cement its legacy as the premier opera house both in the city and in the country. Damrosch was invited to return but died suddenly in February 1885.⁴⁷

The shareholders then hired Edmund Stanton as manager and brought in the Wagner-trained conductor Anton Seidl (1850-1898) to continue with the “Germanization of the theater.”⁴⁸ The German-only seasons continued for four more seasons, which brings us to the peak of Wagnerism in New York—the so-called Golden Age—and the period in which *Die Meistersinger* had its American premiere.⁴⁹ Ironically, despite the overwhelming popularity of Wagner’s operas, it was not because of musical taste *per se* that the Board maintained the German seasons. Rather, it was simply financially beneficial to mount German productions. German musicians, especially singers, came for less money than their superstar Italian counterparts and drew a larger and more loyal

⁴⁶ “Amusements: German Opera at the New House,” *New York Times*, 14 August 1884, 4.

⁴⁷ “Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, 17 February 1885, 2.

⁴⁸ Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera*, 7.

⁴⁹ “Three Seasons of German Opera: Every Prospect that it Will be Given that Much Longer at the Metropolitan,” *New York Herald*, 7 January 1886, 5.

audience.⁵⁰ Thus despite the musical preferences of the Board, the German-only seasons and Wagner were essential to the continued success of the Met.⁵¹

Unfortunately, in January 1891 the shareholders decided that they needed to balance the repertoire with some Italian and French opera (sung in the original languages), and the all-German seasons came to an end. The shareholders brought back Henry Abbey (who managed from 1891 until his death in 1897) and, eventually, Maurice Grau (whose tenure ran from 1897 to 1903). Yes, there would still be Wagner, but it would now be sung in Italian by Italian singers!⁵² And though the ticket-buying public was strongly opposed to the decision, the Board held firm. Its members felt it was far more desirable to stage more expensive, yet more enjoyable (at least in their opinion) traditional Italian opera than it was to stage less-expensive, yet “intellectually burdening” German opera.⁵³ A scathing editorial in *The New York Times* vilified the Met for the decision:

Seven years of honest operatic art ended yesterday. The shallow insincerity of the Directors of the Metropolitan Opera House has proved over and over again. This

⁵⁰ Approximate Profit and Loss Statement for Week Ending 27 February 1916, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁵¹ Despite the popularity of Wagner with the general ticket buyers, there are many anecdotes of boxholders, specifically the matrons, becoming frustrated during performances of Wagner’s operas owing to their length and the lack of recitative sections. They wanted to “entertain guests” from other boxes during the recitatives and listen only to the arias. Plus they were becoming increasingly angry at non-boxholders in the orchestra and balcony sections who would audibly bristle at the noisy conversations from the boxes. Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera*, 53.

⁵² “The Italian Opera Season: Reasons for the Sudden Change—The Operas to be Presented,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1891, 8.

⁵³ Throughout the Met’s history, there had always been a conflict surrounding the amount of German opera presented. At one point, the stockholders had stipulated that only one-third or less of the subscription nights could contain German opera. Minutes of the Board of Directors, 10 May 1916, Minute Book (13 May 1914 - 8 May 1918), Metropolitan Opera Archive.

parsimonious spirit was doubtless due to the lack of enthusiastic admiration for German opera.”⁵⁴

The *New York Herald* contrarily stated:

The men who built the Metropolitan Opera House as we all know it, have never had much liking for Teutonic opera. They accepted it, not because they preferred it to the opera in France and Italy, but because it was cheaper and being, perhaps, not very musical, they did not feel disposed to spend much money on music. With the echoes of *Die Meistersinger* sounding in our ears it may seem thankless to say that we rejoice in the changes. But we do.⁵⁵

The now Italian-only seasons remained in effect until the beginning of the 1896/1897 season, when the Board decided to mix the repertoire. Yet *Die Meistersinger* in German was not to be until the 1899/1900 season. This was not an endorsement of German opera *per se*, but merely an acknowledgement of financial necessity. The *New York Times* remarked, “It must be owned that *Die Meistersinger* loses a great deal when it becomes *I Maestri Cantori*.⁵⁶

From Impresario to German Financier

Upon Grau’s death in 1903, the shareholders awarded the lease to the impresario Heinrich Conried (1855-1909) after a long competition between him and Walter

⁵⁴ “Live Musical Topics,” *New York Times*, 22 March 1891, 12.

⁵⁵ “More Melody than Harmony,” *New York Herald*, 18 January 1891, 10. *The New York Times* writer’s criticism, that non-Germans (or Latins) cannot perform Wagner, became a common trope. Indeed, this persists well into the twentieth century. The writer then crystalizes an argument that German opera is high art, while Italian opera is not. He ends by prophetically invoking Hans Sachs, “Honor your German masters.” This initiated a mini-feud in the press. *The New York Times* and *New-York Tribune* sided with the German public (the *Tribune* found the productions to be “decidedly inadequate”). The *Herald* was on the side of Abbey and Grau, while the *Sun* stated, “The substitution is for the sake of variety [. . .] to find out whether people like Italian opera better than they did when Mr. Abbey gave it to them eight years ago. [. . .] They disclaim hostility to German opera, although they voted for the change.” “Music: *Die Meistersinger* in Italian,” *New-York Tribune*, 3 March 1892, 7; “Italian Opera for a Change,” *The Sun*, 16 January 1891, 6.

⁵⁶ “Meistersinger at the Opera: Defeat of Mr. David Bispham as Bechmesser [sic],” *New York Times*, 19 November 1896, 5.

Damrosch (Leopold Damrosch's son).⁵⁷ Conried, still seeing the merit in the German ticket-buying audience, fostered the Metropolitan's reputation as a steadfast German company. Despite the fact that his reign came after the "German-only" seasons, his two most important contributions to the structure and history of the Metropolitan were his groundbreaking task of mounting the American premiere of Wagner's *Parsifal*⁵⁸ and the entrée of influential financial backers to buttress his vision of the Met as a premier venue for Wagner. In 1903, the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company (also known as the "Opera Company") was incorporated with Conried as president.⁵⁹ Conried immediately differed from his predecessors by assembling financiers (and not necessarily from the upper-most echelons of society) as initial investors into this company. Through a series of financial-industry relationships, this brought banker Otto Kahn (1867-1934), a German-Jewish naturalized citizen who was a junior partner with Kuhn, Loeb & Co., into the circle; he would eventually become president of the Metropolitan.⁶⁰

The presence of Jewish and German financial backers in the Metropolitan Opera Company is important because it created conflicts that were to endure for the next few

⁵⁷ "Successor To Mr. Grau: Belief that the Metropolitan Company Will Choose Today. Walter Damrosch Considered Most Likely to be Selected—Heinrich Conried's Prospects," *New York Times*, 13 February 1903, 9.

⁵⁸ Wagner's festival opera was forbidden from performances outside of Bayreuth. After a bitter court battle against Cosima Wagner, the Met, through the stewardship of Conried, mounted the first non-Bayreuth performance of *Parsifal* in 1903. "Wagner seeks to Enjoin *Parsifal*," *The Evening World*, 29 September 1903, 1; "Cannot Stop *Parsifal*," *New-York Tribune*, 25 November 1903, 1; N. C. Donato, "Parsifal," *New York Times* 17 May 1903, 8.

⁵⁹ "Conried Opera Company Incorporated," *New York Times*, 27 February 1903, 6.; "Conried Chosen," *New-York Tribune*, 15 February 1903, 11.

⁶⁰ For this, Conried was advised by his long-time friend, the financier Henry Morgenthau. He selected persons with whom the Real Estate Company would feel comfortable, that is, people of high social stature (one of their own), yet not quite as high on the society ladder as to be directly threatening. Morgenthau recommended James Hazen Hyde, the young heir to the Equitable Life fortune, who had as his bankers and advisors Kuhn, Loeb & Co. (a financial institution second only to J. P. Morgan's). Hyde then invited Jacob Schiff of Kuhn, Loeb & Co. to join the Board. Schiff declined but invited Otto Kahn. Theresa M. Collins, *Otto Kahn: Art, Money & Modern Time* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 71.

decades and would influence decisions regarding both Wagner and *Die Meistersinger*. With the formation of Conried's board, the Metropolitan now had two governing bodies, the Real Estate Company and the Opera Company. The conflicts arose because (1) Otto Kahn's Kuhn, Loeb & Co. was in direct competition with J. P. Morgan's Wall Street firm, (2) Kuhn & Loeb was a German-Jewish firm,⁶¹ (3) the Real Estate Company was comprised of WASP society, (4) the Opera Company was made up of many German and German-Jewish bankers, and (5) the Opera Company was oriented toward a more German repertoire while the Real Estate Company (which the Opera Company considered to be "un-artistic") favored Italian opera.⁶² Much of this conflict would be played out directly over *Die Meistersinger*, with Otto Kahn serving as the pivot between the two entities.

In 1908, through shrewd and pointed maneuvers, Kahn was able to oust Conried and become the majority stockholder in the newly named Metropolitan Opera Company. Artistic control now lay with the company's directors (still largely made up of financiers), rather than with an impresario, and the directors could therefore oversee the artistic management. The driving desire of Kahn was to make the Metropolitan the premiere opera house of the country.⁶³ Moreover, it was Otto Kahn who guided the Metropolitan Opera through the difficult years of World War I.

⁶¹ The pervading, unspoken practice on Wall Street was that Jewish and WASP firms did not compete within the same ventures. This practice was broken in connection with Met as the Real Estate Company / Opera Company configuration pitted the most powerful Jewish firm (Kuhn & Loeb) against the most powerful WASP firm (J. P. Morgan). Collins, *Otto Kahn*, 71.

⁶² Giulio Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 155.

⁶³ "Romeo et Juliette Opens Opera Season," *New York Times* 27 November 1906, 9.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF WAGNER

As noted above, a perfect storm of variables existed out of which the meteoric rise of Wagner emerged: controversial composer, a press eager to exploit the controversy, favorable ticket-buying demographics, and a venue initially keen to put profits before personal tastes. In addition to these, there were other circumstances that contributed to the Wagner juggernaut: a superstar conductor (Seidl), an active network of German music societies, and a slight shift in the traditional societal roles of women. It is with these features in mind that we will now examine the phenomenon itself.

The so-called Golden Age ran from approximately 1880 to 1900, with the founding of the Metropolitan Opera (in 1883) and the death of conductor-and-Wagner acolyte Anton Seidl (in 1898) as the bookends. It has been stated that, during this period, one could hear Wagner performed nearly every single night at different venues throughout the city. At the Met, his operas comprised 23% of the total repertoire.⁶⁴ In fact, there were even negotiations for Wagner to come to America to build a Bayreuth-like theatre here. The negotiations fell through as Wagner requested the then impossible sum of \$1 million.⁶⁵ Of this frenzy, J.C. Hadden, writing in *Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, commented:

Wagner is held up to our admiring gaze as the Napoleon of the realms of music—the one and only creative artist worthy of our attention. [. . .] But the point is that we are having too much of Wagner. [. . .] Wagner is literally for all time. We have Wagner ‘nights’ as often as three times a week and when a performance is not exclusively Wagner it is almost certain that half or three parts of it will be given up to him.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Gerald Fitzgerald, ed., *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989), 247–329.

⁶⁵ “General Notes,” *New-York Tribune*, 25 January 1881, 4.

⁶⁶ J.C. Hadden, “Wagner Mania,” *Nineteenth Century, A Monthly Review* 44 (July 1898): 125.

Early Pioneers in American Wagnerism

While it was through the American press that many first met Wagner, it was the tireless work of a number of conductors that most aided the Wagner ascendancy. During the nineteenth century in New York City, there was a common (albeit misguided) belief that American musicians, conductors, and composers were inferior to their European (specifically German) counterparts. As such, most of the conductors in New York at the time were from Germany. These conductors also shared an advocacy of Wagner. Without the efforts of Carl Bergmann, Hans von Bülow, Theodore Thomas, and Leopold Damrosch, the sensation of Wagner may have been but a small flurry covered in the press. However, the conductor who stewarded the Wagner repertoire to its heights was Anton Seidl (who, ironically, was not himself German—see below). From 1885 until his death in 1898 Seidl was the preeminent conductor of Wagner at the Metropolitan, leading virtually all of the Wagner performances in the late 1880s and early 1890s. His tenure at the Metropolitan represented the peak of American Wagnerism and included such noteworthy honors as the American premiere of *Die Meistersinger* (complete) in 1886. He brought such a high level of artistry to the performances that the Metropolitan was considered the standard against which all other American Wagner performances were measured.

Anton Seidl was born in Budapest in 1850 and studied at the Leipzig Conservatory.⁶⁷ In Germany, Seidl had been Wagner's personal secretary, assistant conductor, and vocal coach. And, under Wagner's careful tutelage he had served as

⁶⁷ Henry T. Finck, ed., *Anton Seidl: A Memorial by his Friends* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 1. Henry Finck was the music editor of the *New York Evening Post*. He was a great admirer of Seidl, and upon the latter's death in 1898, he was solicited to write and edit a biographical and critical sketch about the late conductor.

Wagner's copyist. This endless task gave him an intimate knowledge and insight into the music.⁶⁸ In Seidl, American audiences had found a physical link to the master.

Audiences felt that they were seeing the "real Wagner" conduct, all others having been mere imitators.⁶⁹ The German-only seasons at the Metropolitan centered around Seidl, and even the Italian-only seasons still featured Seidl as the Wagner conductor (with the Wagner sung in Italian).

With many of the early performances of Wagner having been done under the auspices of German societies such as the Liederkranz Society and the Arion Society, the next logical step during the height of the Wagner-mania was the formation of Wagner societies. These societies became a major force in the spread of Wagner's popularity and included musicians, conductors, and wealthy patrons among their ranks. Further, these societies shared many of the same members as the board of the Met. In addition to championing Wagner's music, they promoted his philosophy as well. One such notable society, the Wagner Society founded in 1887 at the behest of then Metropolitan Opera secretary Edmund Stanton, endeavored to "promote musical culture on such lines as may be read in the writings and compositions of Richard Wagner."⁷⁰ With the Wagner-mania now at its peak, there was a demand for performances at venues more financially accessible than the Met. Thus the various societies promoted and facilitated performances of Wagner at different venues in Brooklyn: Brighton Beach, Coney Island, Manhattan Beach, and Brooklyn Academy of Music, most of them featuring Seidl on the

⁶⁸ In an article for the *North American Review*, Anton Seidl wrote, "Nothing can be finer than the study of Wagner's operas, representing as they do the perfect blending of the drama and music." Anton Seidl, "Wagner's Influence on Present Day Composers," *North American Review* 158 (January 1894): 92.

⁶⁹ This is not a fair verdict given that Theodore Thomas, Leopold Damrosch, and Carl Bergmann had all begun their careers in Germany and all had direct connection with Wagner.

⁷⁰ "A New Musical Society," *The Sun*, 1 September 1887, 2.

podium. In addition, many of these groups had up-and-coming society doyennes as their leaders. This last aspect is important insofar as young women figured prominently in the Wagner fan base.⁷¹

The changing perception of women within society was a vital feature of the Wagner cult. And just as Wagner's music was considered modern, if not occasionally scandalous, the role of women within society was on the precipice of a great upheaval. While not quite the suffrage movement, these "new" women were pushing the envelope on allowable behavior within society.⁷² One need only remember Isadora Duncan as the embodiment of both the new woman and new art.⁷³ It was in Wagner's music that these women found an outlet for their expressiveness. Indeed, it was these women who would frequently establish the various Wagner societies and organize the concerts at different venues.⁷⁴ It was these women who facilitated the Wagner mania.

⁷¹ See Adrienne Fried Block, "Matinee Mania, or, The Regendering Of Nineteenth-Century Audiences in New York City," *19th Century Music* 3 (Spring 2008), 193-216; Ralph P. Locke, "Paradoxes of the Woman Music Patron In America," *Musical Quarterly* 4 (Winter, 1994), 798-825.

⁷² This new woman came from wealth, was well read, amassed a vast and impressive library of books and pamphlets, rode bicycles, smoked or drank in public, and, perhaps most scandalously, challenged then-pervading views on sexuality. Among the many studies on the "New Women," I have found Sally Ledger's *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) particularly useful.

⁷³ Mary Simonson, "Performing the Past: Isadora Duncan and Wagnerism in the American Imagination," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65 (Summer 2012): 511-555.

⁷⁴ Laura Langford was one such example. She founded the Seidl Society and indeed promoted and facilitated numerous Wagner concerts and lectures around the city. Her organization would even provide transportation to the various venues for those in need. "Woman's Mission: Miss Susan B. Anthony Tells the Seidl Society What It Is," *New York Times*, 31 August 1889, 8; "Mr. Krehbiel's Lectures," *New York Times*, 21 November 1889, 2; "Children to Sing With Seidl: Arrangements for a Grand Closing Festival at Brighton," *New York Times*, 18 August 1895, 16; "Brooklyn's Working Girls," *The Sun*, 11 December, 1889, 3; "Amusements," *New-York Tribune*, 13 November 1892, 11; "All Ready for 'Die Walküre'," *New-York Tribune*, 28 March 1897, 10.

The Decline in Popularity

With Seidl's untimely death in 1898, the opera community lost an important direct link to Europe and to the "Master," and this began the decline of the Wagner "cult." This was also facilitated by Seidl's having died without an heir apparent. He did not leave a substantial legacy. Unlike his more memorable contemporaries, he was not a significant composer, as were Victor Herbert (his former assistant), John Philip Sousa, Leopold Damrosch, or Gustav Mahler. He was also a generation shy of the recording industry, so there is no significant body of recording.⁷⁵ Moreover, by 1910, with the encroaching unrest in Europe, a combination of shifting operatic tastes and demographic changes ate into the popularity of both Wagner and *Die Meistersinger*. And though Wagner's works still constituted a hefty 18% of the Met's total repertoire,⁷⁶ this would soon change. The push-pull of the Met's Directors versus its Board would soon result in a more balanced, less Wagner-oriented repertoire.

The appointment of Giulio Gatti-Casazza as General Manager of the Met in 1908 and the ascent of Otto Kahn as its President were the harbingers of changes to come.⁷⁷ A new Italian repertoire was coming to town, and the popularity of such composers as Ruggero Leoncavallo (1857-1919), Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945) and, particularly,

⁷⁵ There is a terrific amount of symbolism in Seidl's grand funeral procession, both on a personal level as well as the more corporeal end of the Wagner cult. The procession began at Seidl's home on East 62nd Street and continued down to the Metropolitan Opera House at 40th Street and Broadway. A band on the corner of 40th Street played the Funeral March from Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 12 in A-flat, Op. 26. Inside the filled auditorium, the eulogy was given by Henry Krehbiel, a close friend and critic for the *New-York Tribune*, followed by the orchestra playing "Siegfried's Tod und Trauermarsch." "Seidl Funeral Services," *New York Times*, 31 March 1898, 7.

⁷⁶ Fitzgerald, *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera*, 247–329.

⁷⁷ In addition to the increase in the Italian opera, both men pushed for American opera. Between 1910 and 1935, the Met staged fourteen new American operas by composers such as Charles Wakefield Cadman and Victor Herbert. See Carolyn Guzski "American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910-1935," Ph.D dissertation, The City University of New York (2001); Giulio Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera*, 155.

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) was increasing. Gatti-Casazza had been a staunch Wagnerian, but he also had close ties with the Milanese publisher G. Ricordi & Co. and considered Puccini a close friend. The year after Gatti-Casazza took control, performances of Puccini operas numbered only three less than Wagner's.⁷⁸ Moreover, there was a newly arrived Italian population that sought its own entertainment. Italian immigration grew to 340,765 in 1910 (up from 145,000 in 1900), as the total Italian population (including first-generation children) swelled to 523,310, more than half of the total foreign-born population in New York City.⁷⁹ Much like Leopold Damrosch and the German population and repertoire in the 1880s, Gatti-Cassaza clearly saw the benefit of staging Italian opera for a growing Italian audience.

In addition to the changes in demographics and tastes, there were logistical issues. Some of the important venues for Wagner had ceased to exist. Additionally, some of the original greats of Wagnerian singing (Lilli Lehmann, Lillian Nordica, and others) had aged and retired within a few years of one another. Nor were German singers being courted as they had been in previous decades. There was no “next generation” to replace the recently retired singers. Thus while the music of Wagner continued to play a major role at the Metropolitan Opera until the United States entered the World War I, it would never hold the same prominence that it had enjoyed during the final two decades of the previous century.

⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera*, 247–329.

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of Commerce, 1910 Prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. U.S. Department of Commerce, 1900 Prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

DIE MEISTERSINGER AND EARLY WAGNERISM

The American premiere of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (with some cuts to the original score) took place in 1886 at the Metropolitan Opera under the baton of Anton Seidl, almost twenty years after the world premiere in Munich in 1868 under Hans von Bülow. During the years between these performances, *Die Meistersinger* was represented in the United States by excerpts only. Moreover, two important events occurred in 1883: Wagner passed away and, as we have seen, the Metropolitan Opera Company was founded. The remainder of this chapter looks specifically at the history of *Die Meistersinger* in New York City during the period under consideration. It reviews the reception in the press and takes up the politics of the opera. What emerges is this: the questions and problems that caused so much angst at the time of World War II are present from the very beginning.

Premiere and Reception in the Press

During the period around the 1868 Munich premiere, most of the news about *Die Meistersinger* was introduced largely through *Dwight's Journal of Music*, with some coverage also appearing in the local New York press. As with most Wagner reception of the time, the coverage of *Die Meistersinger* is divisive and polarized. *Dwight's* initiates the coverage with a brief mention in 1867 of the rumors circulating that Wagner would not finish the opera (owing to its massive scale).⁸⁰ *Dwight's* and its foreign music correspondents published prolifically on *Die Meistersinger* during the year of its premiere. In addition, sticking to the tried and true, *Dwight's* published a mix of American writers and English translations of articles from the European press. The first

⁸⁰ "Music Abroad," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 27 (6 July 1867): 62; "Music Abroad," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 27 (7 December 1867): 148.

review of *Die Meistersinger* dates from July 18, 1868, and comes from Richard Pohl in the *Leipzig Signale*. Remarking on its length he stated:

We know many grand operas which last as long and many lesser ones which are shorter. [. . .] There is a richness of invention in this score, a wealth of outline, ornament, coloring, in short all sorts of details work, such as we find in no other operas of Wagner's if we except *Tristan*, which is of course wholly different in style.⁸¹

Thus the first review read by Americans was favorable.

Dwight's then published an English translation of a lengthy French review from *Le Revue et Gazette musicale*, which stated that Wagner is at his most enjoyable when he loosens his restrictions on his music and allows himself to “remain within the reach of those simple persons who have learnt to feel in the school of Beethoven and Weber.”⁸² This type of comment is common during the period. Much of the positive reception has to do with *Die Meistersinger* being more “melodic” in a conventional sense than Wagner's other works. The review is also remarkable in that it directly addresses one of the more problematic parts of the opera: Hans Sachs's final speech, specifically his reference to German greatness succumbing to “foreigners.”⁸³ This problematic speech

⁸¹ Richard Pohl, “Germany.” *Leipzig Signale*. As reprinted in *Dwight's Journal of Music* 28 (18 July 1868): 279. Original publication date for *Leipzig Signale* article unlisted.

⁸² This review is also notable in that it provides a lengthy synopsis as well as a “history” of the Meistersingers. The reviewer states that the Meistersinger trace their heritage back to the French Troubadours, but that they ruined the musical tradition with their rigid rules. “Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg,” *La Revue et Gazette musicale*, as reprinted in *Dwight's Journal of Music* 28 (15 August 1868): 291.

⁸³ “Habt Acht! Uns dräuen üble Streich! zerfällt erst deutsches Volk und Reich, in falscher wälscher Majestät kein Fürst bald mehr sein Volk versteht, und wälschen Dunst mit wälschem Tand sie pflanzen uns in deutsches Land; was deutsch und echt, wüsst' keiner mehr, lebt's nicht in deutscher Meister Ehr.” “Beware! Evil tricks threaten us: if the German people and kingdom should one day decay, under a false, foreign rule soon no prince would understand his people; and foreign mists with foreign vanities they would plant in our German land; what is German and true none would know, if it did not live in the honour of German Masters.” Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Act III, Scene 5, Piano-Vocal score (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1970), 564. While Wagner doesn't specify anyone in particular when he refers to “foreigners,” it has long been assumed to mean either the French or the Jews. The writer states, “[...]Hans Sachs

will be discussed at greater length further in this study, but it is noteworthy in this context for two reasons: 1) the issues within this work that would cause such consternation during the two world wars were already apparent to the first wave of critics, and 2) Dwight chose to highlight this aspect by publishing the review; he chose to make the American public aware of the controversy.

Among other dissenting voices in *Dwight's*, there is that of Dr. William Spark of the London Choir, who remarked upon a performance he had seen while touring Germany:

Undoubtedly, Wagner's instrumentation is the work of a master and not for one moment does he apparently allow the performers to indulge in the luxury of a few bars rest. [. . .] It was impossible to catch more than the ghost or fragment of a tune. [. . .] I did not hear very much of Wagner's music, but what I did hear I can conscientiously say I did not like.⁸⁴

Although *Dwight's* published more responses and reviews of *Die Meistersinger* around the time of its Munich premiere than most other publications, there was a flurry of press coverage in Europe: "The music journals, German, French, and English, are full of the *Meistersinger*. The majority condemn, but there are also strenuous advocates."⁸⁵ Unfortunately, *Dwight's* folded in 1881, and it was therefore not around for the American premiere.

The Munich premiere only received scant notice in New York's daily press. The *New-York Tribune* stated, "Letters which have reached Paris from Munich contain

terminates the ceremony by addressing to him [Walther] a few very sensible words upon the value of inspiration, and the usefulness of rules—as well as on the mission of German art, *perverted by the Gallic taste and by princes.*" (writer's emphasis). "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 28 (15 August 1868): 291.

⁸⁴ William Spark, "A Musical Tour in North Germany," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 30 (17 December 1870): 363.

⁸⁵ "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 28 (15 August 1868): 294.

brilliant accounts of the great musical solemnity of the year, namely, the first representation of Wagner's *Maitre Chanteurs de Nuremburg*.”⁸⁶ In the magazine *Old and New*, the reporter noted that he had preconceived notions about the music owing to other reviews, yet he was pleased.⁸⁷ The other prominent local newspapers of the time, particularly *The New York Times*, *New York Herald*, and *The Sun*, were all relatively silent, the discourse surrounding Wagner, his theories, and *Die Meistersinger* being centered mainly in the music press and other periodicals.

There is a period of early *Meistersinger* reception in New York that ran from roughly 1870 to the American premiere at the Metropolitan Opera Company in 1886. While this phase involved only performances of excerpts, there is an increased awareness of both the opera and its composer. While New York audiences were somewhat cognizant of Wagner's philosophies of art and music (stemming mainly from the reprint of Wagner's prose in *Dwight's Journal of Music*) and also that *Tannhäuser* was a decade past its American premiere, there was a building excitement surrounding the composer.⁸⁸ It was during this time when other works had their American premieres such as *Lohengrin* (1871), *Der fliegende Holländer* (1876), and *Die Walküre* (1877). Coinciding with this was the frenzy surrounding the building of the festival theater in Bayreuth, the American Bicentennial in Philadelphia, for which Wagner composed a march, and the beginning of the so-called Wagner Golden Age.

Table 1 provides a list of some of the major performances of excerpts from *Die Meistersinger*. And though not complete, it provides a glimpse into the early performers.

⁸⁶ “Foreign Notes,” *New-York Tribune*, 14 July 1868, 8.

⁸⁷ “Fine Arts,” *Old and New* 3 (January 1871): 489.

⁸⁸ As to the awareness of the work's nationalism, and, by extension, the nationalism of the composer, there is not much commentary in the press. Where the work is discussed, the discourse follows more about the length and the lack of melody.

It was Theodore Thomas who initially championed this work, but others quickly joined in. The Metropolitan Opera even staged concert series and benefits at which it performed excerpts of *Die Meistersinger* beginning in 1884, two years shy of its American premiere.

Table 1
Excerpted Performances of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Date	Excerpt Performed	Performer / Conductor	Comments
4/1875	Excerpt not specified	Theodore Thomas and the Thomas Philharmonic at Steinway Hall	
10/1876	Overture and Act III Quintet	Theodore Thomas and the Thomas Philharmonic at Steinway Hall	
10/1877	Overture	Theodore Thomas and the Thomas Philharmonic at Steinway Hall	
2/1878	“Wahn Monologue” and “Cobbler’s Song”	Franz Remmert with Theodore Thomas and the Thomas Philharmonic	Performance reviewed favorably.
6/1878	Overture	Theodore Thomas and the Liederkrantz Society at Gilmore’s Garden	
5/1881	“Pogner’s Address,” “Walther’s Song,” and final chorus	Mm. Stoddard with Walter Damrosch and Grand Festival Chorus of 1,200 Singing Society members at 7 th Avenue Armory	<i>Die Meistersinger</i> performed at mid-concert. Crowd, still applauding, prevents concert from continuing. Concert was part of the German Singing Society Festival.
4/1883	Overture, “Pogner’s Address,” Finale	Concert Society of New York	“This music may also be said not to have been heard here until last evening, the freshness, fire and glow of it being unequaled.” <i>New-York Tribune</i> , April 15, 1883.
4/1884	Final chorus	Concert Society of New York at Steinway Hall	
4/1884	Overture and “Pogner’s Address”	Emil Scarria with Theodore Thomas and the New York Philharmonic Society at Academy of Music	Part of a Wagner series at the Academy of Music.
4/1884	Excerpt not specified	Theodore Thomas with the Liederkrantz Society at Steinway Hall	Part of a Wagner Series.
4/1884	“Pogner’s Address”	The Metropolitan Opera	
1/1885	Act III Chorale, “Wachet Auf”	Leopold Damrosch conducting the Metropolitan Opera Company	One month before Damrosch’s death.
2/1885	Act III Chorale, “Wachet Auf”	John Lund conducting the Metropolitan Opera Company	Benefit concert.

As noted above, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* had its American premiere at the Metropolitan Opera on January 4, 1886, under Anton Seidl. This was in the middle

of the Met's successful German-only seasons. *Die Meistersinger* was the main feature of the "season of Grand opera in German."⁸⁹ The announcement from the previous day's *New York Times* states that the opera was "to be brought out with great splendor."⁹⁰ The initial reviews were generally positive, with the *New-York Tribune* stating of the production:

The first representation of Wagner's "Die Meistersinger" at the Metropolitan Opera a week ago last night was so admirable in conception and so excellent in execution as to call out expressions of undisguised astonishment from many musicians and amateurs who had witnessed performances of the opera in European capitals.⁹¹

One of the more laudatory *New York Times* reviews stated that it "is a wonderful mosaic of beautifully blended colors, in which the master's skill in creating a language of tones [. . .] is shown with marvelous felicity."⁹² The *New York Herald* was equally as enthusiastic: "The most entertaining and inspiring work of the Metropolitan's present season."⁹³ A review of the fourth performance stated, "Its satire keen, its humor irresistible, its melodies exquisite, and it possesses the power to call up a remote epoch with astounding fidelity."⁹⁴

Not all of the reviews were as ebullient, with most of the detractors faulting the enormous length and what was perceived as Wagner's heavy-handed attempt at humor. Table 2 lists the number of performances of *Die Meistersinger* on a season-to-season basis from 1885-1886 through 1909-1910.

⁸⁹ "Amusements," *New York Times*, 3 January 1886, 7.

⁹⁰ "Amusements," *New York Times*, 2 January 1886, 7.

⁹¹ "Music—The Drama: German Opera at the Metropolitan." *New-York Tribune*, 12 January 1886, 4.

⁹² "Amusements," *New York Times*, 17 January 1886, 6.

⁹³ "The American Opera Season Opened Auspiciously at the Academy," *New York Herald*, 4 January 1886, 3,

⁹⁴ Untitled Article, *New York Herald*, 7 February 1886, 11.

Table 2
Opera Performances
of *Die Meistersinger*
from 1885/1886 – 1909/1910.

Season	Number of Performances	Comments
1885 / 1886	8	American premiere at Met on 4 January 1886.
1886 / 1887	5	
1887 / 1888	1	Marks the formation of Wagner Society featuring Anton Seidl and full orchestra with Met secretary Edward Stanton as President.
1888 / 1889	13	
1889 / 1890	6	
1890 / 1891	6	Announcement of Italian and French-only seasons. Press scuffle follows immediately. See below.
1891 / 1892	4	First year of Italian and French season, <i>Die Meistersinger</i> performed as “I Maestri Cantori.” Usually performed by Italian singers with Italian chorus.
1892 / 1893	1	Year of fire, Met dark for most of season.
1893 / 1894	2	New production, still in Italian.
1894 / 1895	2	Walter Damrosch able to mount a mini-season of German opera after the regular season. A return to German announced.
1896 / 1897	3	
1897 / 1898	0	Anton Seidl’s death.
1898 / 1899	0	
1899 / 1900	5	Change to German language for German opera finally implemented.
1900 / 1901	5	
1901 / 1902	5	
1902 / 1903	6	
1903 / 1904	0	Heinrich Conried appointed to General Manager.
1904 / 1905	12	New production, critically successful.
1905 / 1906	4	
1906 / 1907	0	
1907 / 1908	5	
1908 / 1909	5	Giulio Gatti-Cassaza begins long reign as General Manager. <i>Die Meistersinger</i> performed without cuts for first time.
1909 / 1910	4	Arturo Toscanini hired. New production.

As Table 2 shows, the first fifteen seasons (1885/1886 through 1909/1910) of *Die Meistersinger* in New York City were not without controversy. After the American premiere, during the Wagner cult's zenith, the first major controversy came in 1890/1891, when the Met issued a statement that it would cease the German-only seasons beginning in 1891/1892 and would perform operas only in Italian and French. Thus *Die Meistersinger* would still be presented, but in Italian, as *I Maestri Cantori*. The response in the press was swift and brutal. The party lines were largely drawn according to the tastes of the paper. The divisive arguments followed the same pattern that had plagued much of the previous Wagner rhetoric and would serve as a preview of discourse to come. The question of the German-ness of the opera was at the heart of the issue. Could the appropriate German nuances be presented in Italian? This was to be the first of many of the Italian vs. German arguments.

The *New York Herald* praised the change, as it had been calling for lighter fare for some time.⁹⁵ Indeed, the writer at the *Herald* had taken credit for the change. On the other hand, *The New York Times* decried the change, calling it the death knell for German opera in New York: "It would, therefore be a good thing for our stockholders to bear in mind the words of Hans Sachs, 'Honor your German Masters.'"⁹⁶ Clearly, the writer thought that the change had been engineered by those of the stockholders who favored Italian opera and who had unanimously voted for its approval.⁹⁷ The Board had tired of the heavy German fare and had put its foot down. An acrid observation in *The New York Times* stated:

⁹⁵ "Germans Clamor for Wagner's Operas," *New York Herald*, 17 January 1891, 6.

⁹⁶ *New York Times*, 22 March 1891, 1; "Live Musical Topics," *New York Times*, 22 March 1891, 12.

⁹⁷ "No German Opera Next Season," *New York Herald*, 16 January 1891, 10.

It has been commonly recognized among this select public that the Metropolitan Opera House was irrevocably given over to Germany, and that opera in that edifice meant music-drama. Society did not like it altogether, especially at first. [. . .] They represented the stockholders and they took the same view of their obligations that is to be hoped they take in the more practical corporations of which most of them are doubtless Directors. [. . .] The others have presented a most touching spectacle of self-sacrifice in giving their money to be spent and their ears to be bored for the promotion of a cult in which they profoundly disbelieve.⁹⁸

The public reaction followed along the party lines of the newspapers. The readers of the *Herald* applauded the change, stating that it was “reflective of the population of New York City.”⁹⁹ Another writer stated: “With the echoes of *Die Meistersinger* sounding in our ears it may seem thankless to say that we rejoice in the change. But we do.”¹⁰⁰ Readers of *The New York Times* predictably denounced the change. One writer stated, “Certainly there are good reasons for lamenting the approaching departure into temporary obscurity of great musico-dramatic works which a large portion of the musical public of New York has learned to love and revere.”¹⁰¹ Another commented, “It is dubious as an art experiment. It is flatly in disregard of the large German element and German opera-supporting element that fill the Metropolitan on especially the nights of Wagnerian opera.”¹⁰²

Whereas *Die Meistersinger* was beloved by New York audiences, *I Maestri Cantori* had its doubters. Of its 1892 premiere, *The New York Times* wrote:

The faults of last night’s performance may be summed up in the statement that unless an Italian singer be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of Wagner. It is impossible to Latinize the Teutonism of Wagner. [. . .] it is doubtful whether they can give an

⁹⁸ “The Reaction in Opera,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1891, 4.

⁹⁹ Letter to the Editor, “Cosmopolitan Music,” *New York Herald*, 27 January 1891, 5.

¹⁰⁰ “More Melody than Harmony,” *New York Herald*, 18 January 1891, 10.

¹⁰¹ “Live Musical Topics,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1891, 11.

¹⁰² “Live Musical Topics,” *New York Times*, 25 January 1891, 3.

absolutely true one, for the intensely national spirit of the work is not easily grasped by any mind but that of a born German.¹⁰³

Similarly, the *New-York Tribune* stated that *Die Meistersinger* is “uncomprisingly Teutonic.”¹⁰⁴ The specific German-ness of the opera was thus at the forefront of the dialectic. Unless one was German, one could not perform it. The *New-York Tribune* writer summed it up:

There is much in ‘Die Meistersinger’ the appreciation of which calls for sympathies which only a German can feel. Its comedy element lies in the exposition of phases of social life, the simplicity and ingenuousness of which are like a loadstone to the German heart.¹⁰⁵

This particular feature is paramount in the opera’s reception particularly as it was perceived in the twentieth century. *Die Meistersinger* would not be performed in German again until 1899/1900, eight seasons later.

There were other early controversies, among them new productions in 1893/1894 (still in Italian), 1904/1905 (under the new stewardship of Heinrich Conried), and 1909/1910 (under the new General Manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza, with Toscanini conducting). Each new production had its fair share of issues. The 1904/1905 production was seen to have captured the true “German” spirit of the work. The *Times* stated that it had been “[. . . T]he finest performance of Wagner’s comedy that has ever been given in this country” and that the performers had finally captured the German ethos of *Gemütlichkeit* that had eluded all previous productions.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, the

¹⁰³ “Amusements,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1892, 5.

¹⁰⁴ “Music: Die Meistersinger in Italian,” *New-York Tribune*, 3 March 1892, 7.

¹⁰⁵ “Music—The Drama: German Opera at the Metropolitan,” *New-York Tribune*, 12 January 1886, 4.

¹⁰⁶ “‘Die Meistersinger’ Again,” *New York Times*, 15 December 1904, 9; “The Last Meistersinger,” *New York Times*, 26 January 1905, 7.

Toscanini production was thought to be its opposite. Some believed that an Italian conductor could not accurately represent the German sensibilities of this work. Thus once again, the German-ness was the qualifying feature of this work. The *Sun* vituperatively stated:

The Italian will never be able to understand why his interpretation of a comedy radically and perfectly German is not correct and satisfying when it is musically beautiful. No more can a German comprehend what is the matter with his performance of “Il Trovatore” when he treats it like a tragedy and sings it badly. [. . .] To enable an Italian adequately to interpret “Die Meistersinger” it would be necessary to drain every drop of Italian blood from his veins and fill them with the Gothic fluid. [. . .] He should not be faulted for failing to do what a great German conductor would have done.¹⁰⁷

This observation is a wonderful parallel between the fear and disdain of Toscanini conducting this great German work and Hans Sachs’s final speech decrying great German art falling into the hands of foreigners. That this work was perceived as being quintessentially German was apparent from the very beginning. Indeed, aspects of its German-ness pervaded the discourse beginning with the Munich premiere. It was also this feature that resounded with early audiences. With this in mind, we conclude the chapter with a discussion of the idea of German-ness and *Die Meistersinger* within the context of the late nineteenth century.

The Problems and Politics of Fin-de-Siècle Die Meistersinger

With the initial review of the American premiere of *Die Meistersinger*, the critic for the *New York Times* immediately touched upon one of the more salient issues within the work.

Whether Wagner, while engaged upon his task, intended to draw a semi-historical, semi-romantic picture, presenting a sharp contrast between the practicality and stiffness of

¹⁰⁷ “‘Meistersinger’: Wagner’s Comedy Musically Performed,” *The Sun*, 27 March 1910, 9.

German home life and the beauties of an ideal existence, in which music, poetry, and love should be harmoniously blended, or whether he proposed to hold up his own hardships as a poet and reformer, as compared with the slavishness and formality of vulgarian principles and practice, has been a topic of discussion.¹⁰⁸

The question as to whether or not Wagner projected himself into *Die Meistersinger* as a reformer of art (Walther) or as the benevolent, paternal protector of art (Hans Sachs) is just one of the many problematic features of this work. At its base, *Die Meistersinger* is about art, specifically German art. Yet it is also a political opera. What were the driving political ideas within the opera and what were the external political pressures exerted upon it? What will be seen is that the political pressures to which *Die Meistersinger* was subjected at the time of World War II had their origins in the politics of *fin-de-siècle* New York City. The “problems” that arise later are present from the beginning.

Wagner conceived and initiated the composition of this piece just prior to the failed 1848 revolution and completed it between two highly charged events: the Seven Weeks War of 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, which culminated in the unification of Germany under Otto von Bismark in 1871. One of the main aspects of the reception of *Die Meistersinger* is, as I have noted more than once, the idea and perception of the opera’s German-ness. Wagner had already explored this idea in his 1865 prose work, “Was ist deutsch,” written at the behest of the Ludwig II and then further in his 1867 essay, “Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik.” While this would eventually become a liability, it was entirely *apropos* in the context of late nineteenth-century Germany, particularly a Germany undergoing political and social turmoil while facing an imminent threat from France. Wagner’s harangue (via Hans Sachs’s final speech) against

¹⁰⁸ “Amusements,” *New York Times*, 5 January 1886, 4.

perceived “foreign” enemies (often interpreted as the French) and his homage to “Holy German art,” while seen today as pure jingoism, were appropriate patriotism.

Indeed, his very choice of subject matter is an ode to German art. In utilizing the Meistersinger guild as representative of “holy German art,” Wagner has chosen a group of relatively little historical influence, but one of huge symbolic importance. In choosing to laud a bourgeois group of pedantic, seemingly stilted tunesmiths, Wagner was glorifying Germany. Wagner’s Meistersingers serve a dual function: they are the keepers of German art, but they are also the spring from which a new art is allowed to grow; and only the most enlightened of those will understand this new art.

In New York City, German nationalism in the late nineteenth-century was still decades shy of acquiring the negativism that would latch onto it in the twentieth century. For New York audiences of that earlier time, particularly the Met’s ticket buyers, this nationalism resounded strongly; it was part of the opera’s success. As the *New-York Tribune* stated, Hans Sachs is:

[. . . A] representative of many of the things which are believed in and loved by the German people. He is one of the people, warm-hearted, blunt, unswervingly honest, fervent in his love, having a vein of humor a little caustic but not malicious running through his nature, and devoted to high ideals of art. In such men the Germans see the prototypes of their national character, and they are admired and loved accordingly.¹⁰⁹

And there can be no doubt that, for the *Tribune*, the “German people” included the German-Americans of New York City.

It is somewhat ironic, then, that the patriotism that aided *Die Meistersinger*’s initial popularity in this country would become the very nationalism that would, at least

¹⁰⁹ “Music—The Drama: German Opera at the Metropolitan.” *New-York Tribune*, 12 January 1886, 4.

temporarily, sound its death knell. The German-ness that resounded so strongly with early audiences, this “prototype of the national character,” became too problematic for later audiences. For New York audiences, *Die Meistersinger* became too German, this, of course, as a result of two cataclysmic events of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 2

***DIE MEISTERSINGER* DURING WORLD WAR I**

*[. . .] it is a work that, in its dramatic spirit,
its atmosphere, its true significance is not easily
open to full comprehension of any but a
Teuton born and bred.¹*

The fate of *Die Meistersinger* during World War II—it was banned—had a precedent during World War I, when the Met decided it would be prudent to cancel all operas in the German language. This chapter looks at the opera’s fate at the Met, both during and after the “Great War.” Following a performance on 11 April 1917, *Die Meistersinger* did not return to the Met until 9 November 1923. Yet just prior to its final performance in 1917 it had been as popular as it had been during the Golden Age of Wagner. Even as late as 1914, the reviewer for the *New-York Tribune* remarked, “It has been before the public for twenty eight years—a longer period than The *Tribune*’s reviewer at the time thought likely that it would endure, in view of the uncompromising Teutonism of its comedy [. . .]”² It continued to receive positive reviews, and its important place within the repertoire was beyond question. A 1913 *New-York Tribune* review stated that it was “well up to the standard,” not a glowing review, but good nonetheless for a production that had remained unchanged for a number of years.³ Even with the conflict escalating in Europe, reviews as late as 1917 were still positive. Indeed, it had been a late addition to the 1916/1917 season.⁴ A writer for the *New-York Tribune*

¹ “‘Die Meistersinger’ at Metropolitan: Wagner’s Comedy Given its First Performance,” *New York Times*, 13 March 1915, 13.

² Henry Krehbiel, “‘Die Meistersinger’ Performed at the Met Without Distinction,” *New-York Tribune*, 16 January 1914, 7.

³ “Die Meistersinger Sung,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 April 1913, 9.

⁴ “‘Die Meistersinger’ Added to Repertoire,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 January 1917, 13.

stated, “The continued hold of the great comic opera on public affection was manifested by the large audience.”⁵ Sylvester Rawling of *The Sun* enthused, “It was a performance that gripped the senses, appealed to the imagination and stirred feeling.”⁶

As for the Metropolitan in the years preceding World War I: it was now led by two disparate groups: the initial stockholders (now called the Real Estate Company) and the Board of Directors (also called the Metropolitan Opera Company—now with Otto Kahn as President and Giulio Gatti-Casazza as Musical Director). This two-part directorship model had been in place since the beginning of the century and had functioned, thus far, with little conflict.⁷ And while these two entities occasionally worked at cross-purposes, they successfully stewarded the Met through many a rough storm with continued success. Now, however, this would change. With stockholders who had tired of Wagner and with the looming European conflict and its ensuing anti-German sentiment, the Met felt it necessary to proceed with the pruning of the German opera.

THE FIRST CANCELLATION OF *DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG*

The elimination of an entire portion of the Met’s repertoire, particularly one that had contributed to its success, was the result of a combination of factors: anti-German sentiment resulting from the war, logistical problems (also owing to the war), budgetary concerns, and shifting policies and “politics” within the Met itself.

⁵ “‘Meistersinger’ is Sung Splendidly,” *The Sun*, 18 January 1917, 7.

⁶ Sylvester Rawling, “‘Meistersinger’,” *Evening World*, 10 February 1917, 8.

⁷ There had been some minor skirmishes over facilities and repertoire. An interesting example was the battle over the interior color of the newly redesigned auditorium. One Vanderbilt daughter insisted that it be painted burgundy to better display her jewels. Another clash, this one concerning repertoire, was over Richard Strauss’s *Salome*. Never a fan of Strauss, J. P. Morgan pushed to cancel the upcoming premiere when, during a dress rehearsal, his daughter fainted. *Salome* was not to be performed at the Met again until after Morgan’s death.

Anti-German Sentiment

Whereas the initial reception of Germans and German-Americans in the nineteenth century had been one of reserved acceptance, the sense of foreboding as a result of the gathering storm in Europe placed these German-Americans in a difficult position.⁸ They felt a loyalty to their homeland, yet they had developed an equally intense loyalty to their adopted land. These allegiances were constantly brought into question, and they were eventually forced to choose between old and new homes. Neither choice was particularly advantageous. To profess loyalty towards Germany just before and during the war guaranteed deportation. On the other hand, choosing the United States meant completely forsaking Germany and its culture. Further, Germans who sided with the United States were perceived as being opportunistic and, therefore, always suspect. In addition, there were movements in New York City that sought to expunge anything culturally related to Germany, including literature, theater, music, and, especially, opera.

As might be expected, the anti-German sentiment was at a slow simmer during the first two years of the war, 1914-1915. There were, however, certain indications (especially in the press) of the outrage that would soon occur. Upon the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, the slow simmer boiled over into full paranoia. Several German nationals were stripped of their United States naturalization and deported back to Germany over suspicions of allegiance to the Kaiser.⁹ Many German businesses (including those having long American histories) were suspect. The sentiment even

⁸ The German-Americans came to be known in the press as “hyphenates” during the previous century. Initially this title—adopted by many Germans themselves—carried with it a sense of pride. However, during the era of World War I it was generally used in a pejorative manner.

⁹ “Charge Dr. Tiling with Disloyalty,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1918, 8.

extended to the hysterical and outraged calls to replace German-sounding street names with more appropriate English names, not to mention the fervent pleas to rename sauerkraut “liberty salad” and German measles “Freedom’s rash.”¹⁰ This outrage was frequently perpetrated by so-called Patriotic Societies, clubs formed for the main reason of eradicating all things German. These societies included the International Committee of the Anti-German League, the National Defense League, the National Security League, the American Defense Society, and the American Legion.¹¹ The latter two had members from the highest circles of society, including many current and former high-ranking government officials. The American Defense Society, in particular, wielded great influence, and with their public demonstrations, high-visibility protests, and fashionable benefits, they were able to exacerbate the mania and exploit an already-present fear. Where they would protest, the general public tended to follow. Through the work of their various committees (including the Boycott Committee, Suppression of All Things German Committee, and the Anti-Radicalism Committee),¹² these societies were able

¹⁰ “Oppose German Names,” *New York Times*, 18 May 1918, 8; “To Change German Names on Boats,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1918, 9; “Says Mayor Declines to Bar German Papers,” *New York Times*, 22 May 1918, 24; “Appeal to the President,” *New York Times*, 9 May 1918, 13.

¹¹ The American Defense Society and the American Legion were by far the most influential. The American Legion, formed in 1919, counted among its members Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ogden Mills. Both groups were very active in protesting German opera, even launching campaigns to have then Mayor Hylan ban all German opera in New York City. The American Defense Society was the more sinister of the two. Formed in 1915 on the premise of “adequate national defense of the United States of America,” it contained the cream of society including former President and national hero, Theodore Roosevelt. *Handbook of the American Defense Society* (New York: The Society, 1819), 3.

¹² The Anti-Radicalism Committee, formed for the purpose of seeking and amassing data on “subversives,” extended their influence well into the middle of the century. It subsequently proved to be a tool for the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings in the 1950s. In one of the earliest instances of seeking subversive un-Americans, the ADS formally declared in *The New York Times* that William Randolph Hearst was a “fountain-head” of pro-German propaganda and charged him with controlling the government of New York in addition to being a Bolshevik and a pacifist; “Hearst Denounced as Fountain Head of Sedition Here,” *New York Times*, 3 November 1917, 1.

focus their efforts toward their specific goals: the prohibition of the German language, the boycotting of German goods, German culture, German newspapers, and, most importantly, the banning of German opera.

Musical Germanophobia

Without going a lot into detail, it might be said simply that we do not like the sound of the German gutturals. The trouble with German opera in German is that our mind hears not the theme so much as the shrieks of the Lusitania's dying. Its measured cadences picture not tender human emotions, but a firing squad marching at the goose step upon defenseless women and children. If it conjures up sequestered sylvan glades, we see lying thereon the moaning victims of poison gas. The last German opera we heard or want to hear was the Imperial German Swan Song as rendered by Herr Hohenzollern.¹³

Such statements are indicative of the fervent musical Germanophobia of the time.

German music and German performers became the focus of much jingoistic vitriol.

Many performances were accompanied by protests and demonstrations. Famous German musicians and conductors were now having their loyalty questioned. Both violinist Fritz Kreisler and conductor Dr. Karl Muck were casualties of this sentiment. Both men had established successful American careers, and both men had their careers decimated owing to the hysteria.¹⁴ Needless to say, this paranoia extended to Wagner and specifically to

¹³ "Hylan Bars Opera; Legal Fight Begun," *New York Times*, 22 October 1919, 1.

¹⁴ One example would be the arrest of Dr. Karl Muck, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Muck was pushed to play the "Star-Spangled Banner" before a performance, but the Orchestra management refused. Muck was vilified in the press. The American Defense Society became involved, and as a result of their influence, Muck was arrested under the President's Enemy Alien Proclamation. Muck had also been a celebrated conductor at Bayreuth and praised by Cosima Wagner for his faithfulness to the music. It is worth noting that "The Star-Spangled Banner" did not become the official national anthem of the United States until 1931. It is also worth noting that, ironically, he had recently received the "German Eagle" from Hitler. As for Fritz Kreisler, though he had an American wife and had built a respected career in the United States, he cancelled all performances for the duration of the war, and he felt it inappropriate to accept American money. He returned to the American stage in 1920. Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 300-305; "Dr. Muck Balks at the 'Star Spangled Banner'," *New-York Tribune*, 11 November 1917, 3; "Dr. Muck out of Orchestra," *The Sun*, 31 March 1918, 16;

Die Meistersinger. On two separate occasions protests outside of performances of this work escalated into violence. Both occurred at the Lexington Theatre in 1919. The first performance, mounted by the Rudolph Christians Corporation, elicited the ire of many local and national war-effort organizations, the American Defense society being foremost among them. As one member stated, "It's a shame that New York has forgotten what the Huns did to us over there."¹⁵ There were impassioned pleas to Mayor Hylan and Governor Alfred E. Smith to prevent the performance. Petitions were signed and statements issued. At one point, the Navy Club threatened violence at the performances, even going so far as to state that there were snipers perched on nearby rooftops. Eventually, with much dismay, the Rudolph Christians Corporation cancelled the performance.¹⁶

While violence had been barely averted in the case of the Rudolph Christians Corporation, the Star Opera Company was not as fortunate. This occurred soon after the cancelled performance; now the press coverage was heavier, with many of the stories

"Arrest Karl Muck as an Enemy Alien," *New York Times*, 26 May 1918, 3; Sylvester Rawling, "Operas and Concerts," *The Evening World*, 17 April 1918, 11; "Dr. Muck Interned," *New-York Tribune*, 6 April 1918, 8; "Halt German Opera at Metropolitan," *New York Times*, 2 November 1917, 13; "Kreisler Quits Concert Tour," *New York Times*, 26 November 1917, 1; "An Inevitable Loss," *New-York Tribune*, 27 November 1917, 8; "Throng Hears Kreisler," *New York Times*, 17 November 1920, 22; Carlo Edwards, "Karl Muck Dies, Noted Wagnerian," *New York Times*, 5 March 1940, 27.

¹⁵ "Ask Hylan to Stop German Opera," *New York Times*, 8 March 1919, 1.

¹⁶ "Ban German Plays in German Tongue, Women Demand," *The Evening World*, 5 February 1919, 5; "Plans for German Opera Stirs Wrath," *The Sun*, 7 March 1919, 11; "Praise for Women for Work in War," *New York Times*, 8 March, 1919, 12; "German Opera Producers Ask for Protection," *New-York Tribune*, 9 March 1919, 13; "Soldiers Rebel at German Opera," *New York Times*, 9 March 1919, 1; "Veterans to Fight Opera in German," *New York Times*, 10 March 1919, 1; "Says Machine Guns Faced Teuton Opera," *New York Times*, 16 March 1919, 12; "Hylan Puts Stop to Opera in German," *New York Times*, 11 March 1919, 9.

appearing on page one, and appeals to high government officials were more emotional.¹⁷ The American Legion issued a statement: “That this organization employ every peaceful means within its power to prevent the production of German opera in the German language in New York.”¹⁸ There were attempts by Mayor Hylan to acquire an injunction against the performance, but not in time. The opera went on as scheduled. An angry mob of several thousand, many of them soldiers, formed outside the theater. Eventually, the police lost control of the crowd, and, sensing an increase in violence, charged the crowd on mounts and with their nightsticks. In the ensuing riot many were injured, with one soldier losing his life. Of the performance, *The New York Times*’ Richard Aldrich (who specifically questioned the choice of *Die Meistersinger*) commented, “It was marred by nothing more disastrous than some very bad performances.”¹⁹ The New York press, after much hand wringing, came down soundly in favor of postponing German opera until a later time. The *New-York Tribune* wrote, “German music as art is one thing. German music as propaganda and an excuse for a pro-German demonstration is entirely another.” At this point, then, the *New-York Tribune* saw *Die Meistersinger* as pro-German propaganda.²⁰ After two additional performances (both subject to violent protests) and after extreme legal machinations on the part of the city and state, Supreme Court Justice Leonard A. Geigrich issued the following statement:

¹⁷ “New Operas from Chicago.” *New York Times*, 28 September 1919, XX7; “Singer of German Silenced by Legion,” *New York Times*, 24 September 1919, 18; “The Prussian Way,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 October 1919, 10.

¹⁸ “Singer of German Silenced by Legion,” 18.

¹⁹ “Opera in German Given in Defiance of Hylan and Mob,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1919, 1.

²⁰ “German Opera War—Second Phase,” *New-York Tribune*, 26 October 1919, 10.

The wounds of war have not yet healed. [. . .] It is highly desirable that the passions of the war subside as rapidly as may be. This process cannot be hastened, however, but will be retarded by ill-advised and premature attempts like the one under consideration.²¹

Thus German opera was banished until after the ratification of the peace treaty with Germany. The persecution of Germans at the hands of pro-American societies had reached a level not often seen in this country. That these groups were able to ban German newspapers, German-made goods, and the German language demonstrates the influence they could wield. With this tumultuous background firmly in place, let us now focus on the factors (including budgetary concerns, shifting policies, and repertorial issues) that led to the Metropolitan Opera's momentous decision of 17 November 1917 to eliminate German opera from its repertoire.

Budgetary Concerns

As part of the Met's success was owing to the financial value of German opera, the question of budget was not a significant factor in the German opera "problem." German opera, from its early heyday at the turn of the century until its cancellation in 1917, was less costly. Conversely, the cost of Italian opera was rising. The superstars of Italian opera were paid huge fees for that time. Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) was paid \$2,500 for every performance. His female counterpart, Geraldine Farrar (1882-1967), was paid \$1,300. On the other hand, the highest paid German singer, Johanna Gadski (1872-1932), was paid between \$500 and \$1,000 per performance. On the whole, the Italian singers were paid more and they always had been. As an example, a 1916 production of *Carmen* that listed only three main cast members (Caruso, Farrar, and Pasquale Amato) cost \$4,400 in personnel as opposed to *Götterdämmerung* which cost

²¹ "City Wins in Fight on German Opera," *New York Times*, 28 October 1919, 17.

\$2,575 in personnel and listed five main cast members. However, the expenditures for the Italian superstars proved worthwhile. The *Carmen* made approximately \$12,000 per performance while *Götterdämmerung* netted approximately \$10,000.²² Yet the profit margin for French and Italian productions lacking a Caruso or a Farrar was far less. Thus the Wagner, regardless of performers, had been a reliable cash cow.

Ultimately, despite dubious protests on behalf of the Real Estate Company, finance had little impact upon the verdict toward German opera. According to Otto Kahn's biographer, Theresa M. Collins, the company did suffer minor losses owing to the change in repertoire, but these could be attributed to the normal course of events in a country at war.²³

Shifting Policies

"It is a theatre governed by Italians who seem to be totally out of sympathy with the French, as I am convinced that they will become with the Germans."²⁴

This prescient quote, from 1910, was spoken during the resignation speech of French tenor Edmund Clément. His alarm (and resentment) grew out of the appointment of General Manager Gatti-Casazza, who had been seen initially as pro-Italian. As discussed in Chapter 1, however, Gatti-Casazza was a strong proponent of Wagner, but he was also pragmatic. His increasing the productions of both Italian and American opera is a statement of his ability to read the changing environment. Gatti-Casazza was instrumental in the Met's decision regarding Wagner, yet he alone did not have the

²² Approximate Profit and Loss Statement for Week Ending 27 February 1916, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²³ Theresa M. Collins, *Otto Kahn: Art, Money & Modern Time* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 71.

²⁴ "Clément to Quit the Metropolitan," *New York Times*, March 20, 1910. 11.

authority to make such a sweeping change. Indeed, he needed the blessing of Otto Kahn who, in turn, needed the backing of the Board. What is striking is the degree to which this decision was fraught with uncertainty. There is a sense that neither man necessarily wanted to ban *Die Meistersinger*, but that it was just simply prudent to do so. Both men found themselves at the crossroads of politics and art, an ironic situation given the themes of *Die Meistersinger*. With the increasing anti-German sentiment and full-blown resentment emanating from the Board, the issue of Wagner and *Die Meistersinger* was looming.

*The German Repertoire Problem*²⁵

As noted above, with the encroaching conflict in Europe, anti-German sentiment was swift and absolute. There emerged a stark binary: allowing German music was seen as unpatriotic. Kahn found himself in an impossible situation. Thus as early as 1915, with the sinking of the *Lusitania*, Kahn began exploring, albeit secretly, the idea of cancelling Wagner for the following season. One of the mitigating issues involved the German singers already under contract. As the United States had not yet entered into the conflict, technically Germany was not yet an enemy and all contracts were still valid. Were Kahn to summarily cancel Wagner, he would have had to pay the singers' contract indemnities. This was the main deterrent, as the costs of this action proved prohibitive. In a cable to Kahn, Gatti-Casazza requested, "I ask whether you still think it opportune to change plan of season abandoning German opera and whatever you advise me to try to

²⁵ Most of the information about the events leading up to the decision to jettison Wagner from the repertoire comes from correspondence between Kahn and either Gatti-Casazza or other members of staff. As such, much of it is one-sided in its currently preserved state.

obtain postponement for one year of German artists' contracts."²⁶

Judging by the content of the correspondence between the two men, much of it in telegraphically succinct overseas cables (as Gatti-Casazza spent summers in his native Italy), it seems that Kahn hoped that the German singers would not be able to obtain (or would choose not to) travel from Germany. As proven with the plight of the *Lusitania*, transatlantic travel had become treacherous. The possibility of the German singers not crossing the Atlantic would have been the ideal solution for the shrewd Kahn. On the one hand, the "problem" of the Wagner would automatically become a moot point, as the lack of performers would prevent Wagner productions. Moreover, the singers' inability to travel would cause a *force majeure* that would render their contracts null. In other words, Kahn would have his solution to the Wagner problem and would be relieved of the obligation to buy out the cancelled artists. Yet in a 1915 cable responding to a request of Kahn, Alfred Seligsburg, a Kuhn, Loeb attorney, warned that Kahn should be "always considering probability of artists refusing postponement of contract and proving possibility [of] arriving in New York on neutral ships."²⁷

There were problems associated with this *force majeure* scheme. Gatti-Casazza tested the waters with regard to the German artists' intentions toward the coming 1915/1916 season, and the projected outcome was not what Kahn had hoped for. Gatti-Casazza had attempted to persuade the singers to postpone their engagement for the war's duration (fully expecting that the conflict would end soon and that the seething anti-German sentiment would quickly dissipate). In a letter to Kahn of 27 September 1915,

²⁶ Cable from Giulio Gatti-Casazza to Otto Kahn, 18 September 1915, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 166, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²⁷ Cable from Alfred Seligsburg to Otto Kahn, 1915, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 166, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Gatti-Casazza detailed the outcome:

At any rate, when I received your telegram mentioned above, I imagined that you thought it advisable to abandon the German repertoire either on account of necessary financial economy or owing to a possible anti-German feeling having developed in New York. As reported by cable, I commenced at once my endeavors to induce the German artists to postpone their contracts for one year. However, part of them flatly refused and the others demanded high indemnities.²⁸

While the singers proved the primary obstacle in Kahn's initial plan, the other problem regarding this plan was that in order for Kahn to have legally invoked a *force majeure* as nullifying the German contracts, he would have had to apply it to contracts of singers who were nationals of all countries involved in the conflict, including Italy and France. In other words, the *force majeure* had to apply to all foreign singers. Either he had to cancel all the artists or none. Thus his initial exploration of cancelling the Wagner productions of 1915 proved fruitless.

Despite Kahn's secretiveness in his machinations, rumors of a changed repertoire had begun to circulate in the press in 1915. While the Met's official party line was that politics should not influence art, Metropolitan Opera Comptroller John Brown wrote to Kahn:

[. . .] concerning the article in *The New York Sun*, and, as directed, I immediately issued an official announcement that there was no truth in the rumor that steps were being taken to eliminate German opera from our repertory, but that the works of the German Masters would be included in next season as well.²⁹

²⁸ Letter from Giulio Gatti-Casazza to Otto Kahn, 27 September, 1915, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 166, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²⁹ Letter from John Brown to Otto Kahn, 23 July 1915, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 166, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. It is worth noting that apparently Wilson did take a direct interest in the disposition of German opera. In a *New York Times* review of Ray Stannard Baker's multi-volume *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, Henry Steele Commager states, "Every hour of the day he was called upon to make decisions on major and minor questions [. . .] applications of censorship to particular newspapers,

In a direct response to these (albeit somewhat truthful) rumors Gatti-Casazza replied, “A German made the modern newspaper possible. When you tell me you are ready to suppress newspapers, I will think about suppressing German opera.”³⁰ The duplicitous nature of the tack became the standard procedure throughout this conflict and would prove to be a handy course of action during the conflict that arose two decades later.

The matter was then generally dropped until President Woodrow Wilson’s address to Congress, on 2 April 1917. Five days later, 7 April, the United States officially entered the war. Ironically the announcement came during the Good Friday performance of *Parsifal*. Kahn immediately wrote to President Wilson concerning the “Wagner” problem. As Wilson continued to preach a policy of war with the German government, not with the German people, Kahn had hoped for some guidance. None was forthcoming. Rather, Wilson’s private secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, stated—evasively and ambiguously—that the President trusted the Board of Directors of Metropolitan Opera Company “not to take any extreme or unnecessary action.”³¹

During the weeks prior to the start of the 1917/1918 season, rumors circulated again. Before making any decisions, Gatti-Casazza and Kahn had decided to approach members of the press to get their opinion. According to Gatti-Casazza’s memoirs, he was told to leave the repertoire unchanged.³² An editorial appeared in *The Sun* acknowledging the rumor and stating that, “To discriminate against Bach, Beethoven,

disposition of German prisoners, the presentation of German opera and a thousand like problems.”

³⁰ “New Opera Women are all Beauties,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1915, 7.

³¹ Letter from Otto Kahn to President Woodrow Wilson, 8 April 1917, Box 284, Folder 12; Letter from Joseph Tumulty to Otto Kahn, 20 April 1917, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 284, Folder 12, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

³² Gatti-Casazza, *Memories of the Opera*, 181.

Wagner, and Brahms is pointless: they belong to the world as do Shakespeare and Dante.”³³ The press appeared to sympathize with Gatti-Casazza’s situation while vilifying the Board of Directors for its timidity over the issue. *The Evening World* stated unequivocally, “German operas will be sung at the Metropolitan.”³⁴ In fact, the season had been announced: it included German opera, and the press praised the Met’s decision not to alter its repertoire.³⁵

It is difficult to determine exactly which members of the Real Estate Company / Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company were pushing for the banned German opera and for how long. According to *The New York Times*, it was a minority, yet a vocal and influential one.³⁶ One member of this vocal minority was Clarence MacKay (1874-1938).³⁷ Judging from the correspondence, it was probably MacKay who brought the issue to a head. Just prior to the beginning of the season, MacKay strongly urged Kahn to organize a meeting of the Board to discuss the problem of the German repertoire. “I feel that the question of giving German opera this year is a matter which should be given most careful thought and thorough consideration, and a decision arrived at before the season opens.”³⁸ Throughout this period, the correspondence from MacKay becomes increasingly vitriolic:

³³ “Wagner or No Wagner,” *The Sun*, 15 September 1917, 14.

³⁴ “German Operas Will be Sung at Metropolitan Opera,” *The Evening World*, 17 September 1917, 13.

³⁵ “German Opera is Still Welcome at the Met,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 September 1917, 4.

³⁶ “Halt German Opera at Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1917, 13.

³⁷ Clarence MacKay was the son of the wealthy silver mining magnate John MacKay. Clarence was also a pioneer in the telecommunications business, having been Chairman for both the Postal Telegraph-Cable Corporation and MacKay Radio-Telegraph Radio Company. These companies later merged with ITT with MacKay on the board until his death in 1938. In a peculiar twist of show business fate, MacKay’s daughter Ellin married Irving Berlin against her father’s wishes and was disinherited from the family fortune.

³⁸ Letter from Clarence MacKay to Otto Kahn, 10 October 1917, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

As far as I am concerned, I am unalterably opposed to its [German opera] being made a part of the Metropolitan's repertoire, and I wish to put myself squarely on record as against it. It seems to me there is only one issue, German music against Patriotism, and as a member of the Board of Directors I feel it our duty to stand for the latter to the limit and without adulteration.³⁹

MacKay was somewhat contradictory as well. On the one hand, he had advocated placing the Metropolitan outside the "stirring passions of this world-wide war,"⁴⁰ in other words, the art-before-politics argument. Conversely, he stated that while he loved Wagner, he wanted to be considered "above all as a 100% American first, last and always."⁴¹ With MacKay, we see the beginning of Wagner and, by extension, *Die Meistersinger* being viewed as part of a good-versus-evil continuum.

At this point, just prior to the 1917/1918 season, Kahn was still vacillating. He had wanted ultimately to maintain the repertoire, but was considering the alternative. He first tried to persuade MacKay to keep Wagner on the basis of the press' strong advocacy for the continuation of German opera. In addition, he was able to refer to correspondence between himself and President Wilson (through Tumulty) to reinforce this advocacy. Still further, he argued the inappropriateness of the timing. As the season was nearly beginning, it was simply too late to adjust the repertoire.⁴² Yet in the end, the "vocal minority" proved to be too vocal and too powerful. Once other members of the upper echelon joined MacKay, Kahn was unable to resist. Furthermore, it is entirely possible, that since he had already explored this scenario two years prior, he might have agreed

³⁹ Cable from Clarence MacKay to Otto Kahn, 30 October 1917, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁴⁰ Letter from Clarence MacKay to Otto Kahn, 22 October 1917, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁴¹ Letter from Clarence MacKay to Otto Kahn, 22 October 1917, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁴² Letter from Otto Kahn to Clarence MacKay dated 19 October 1917, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

with the change in practice, if not in principle. As significant a philanthropist and strong proponent for the arts as he was, he was still first and foremost an astute banker with a keen eye toward the bottom line of his ventures.

Otto Kahn's final decision, his loophole, was to cancel not "German" opera, but operas in the German language. And on 17 November 1917, the Metropolitan issued its official statement in *The New York Times*: "The Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company announces that no performances of opera in the German language will be given during the present season." The statement noted a "change in popular feeling" as the main reason. Furthermore, in an effort to over-justify the decision, the statement declared that because German copyrights fall under the new Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917, it was in the Met's best interest to discontinue operas in the German language.⁴³ This also provided an easy "out" for Kahn with regard to the singers' contracts. As the Act disallowed contracts with German nationals, the German singers' contracts were now void. Kahn could now cancel the German opera without having to pay the indemnities. Thus after much hand wringing, Kahn had found his solution. The Wagner repertoire, and *Die Meistersinger* in particular, could successfully be excised. Wagner was simply too "German" to be heard on the Metropolitan stage.⁴⁴

⁴³ "Metropolitan Bars Operas in German," *New York Times*, 3 November 1917, 13. It is worth noting that during the battle for *Parsifal* between Heinrich Conried and Cosima Wagner in 1903, Judge Lacombe had decided that the copyright issue did not apply, as copyright agreements did not exist between the U.S. and Germany. "Can Produce 'Parsifal'," *New York Times*, 25 November 1903, 5.

⁴⁴ Kahn's decision, and the timing of this decision, put the German performers in a tight situation, as many had made the treacherous transatlantic crossing only to discover that not only would they not be performing, but neither would they be getting paid. Many of the singers were simply stranded, near-broke, and branded an enemy. Some would return after the war's end, but many did not. For instance, Margarete Ober sued the Met for breach of contract; and though the Met settled, she was never to sing there again. In addition, Joanna Gadske, who was said to have satirized the sinking of the *Lusitania* at a party, (together with her husband) was rumored to have had strong ties to Germany. She, too, would never sing at the Met again.

Oddly enough, there exists in the Otto Kahn archives another statement about the matter. It is obviously a press release, but it is neither dated nor on letterhead. However, it was date-stamped 17 December 1917. It reads:

In response to numerous enquiries which have come to the Metropolitan Opera Company, the Board of Directors make the following statement: Amidst the mighty conflict which is shaking the world and in which our country has now aligned itself with the other great freedom-loving nations in defense of liberty and justice, there is one field of human activity from which bitterness and hatred have held aloof – the field of art. Over it the neutral flag of beauty is still flying. It is of great importance, from more than one point of view that the passions of war and the strident voices of conflict shall remain hushed in the house of art, belonging, as it does, to all nations. The Metropolitan Opera Co., whilst yielding to none in the singleness of its devotion to America, has reached the conclusion that it is its duty—barring unforeseen events—to continue its international repertoire as heretofore. In doing so, it believes itself to be acting in harmony with the spirit of President Wilson’s address to Congress and particularly with his admonitions that “our quarrel is with the Imperial German Government and not with the German people” and that, as his “own thought has not been driven from its habitual and normal course by the unhappy events of the last two months,” so he does “not believe that the thought of the nation has been altered or clouded by them.” The Metropolitan Opera Co. has reason to believe, also that in the conclusion which it has reached it is meeting the views of the great majority of its audience who have always shown a large broadmindedness and a fine catholicity of taste. Those of its artists who will be reengaged have demonstrated in their conduct during the past three seasons their realization of the fact that as in this country they owe allegiance solely to the American public and to the case of operatic art. Though composed of citizens or subjects of all the leading nations and naturally divided in their sympathies, our troupe of artists have worked together under the roof of the Metropolitan Opera House in complete harmony, unmarred by a single untoward incident.⁴⁵

This press release was obviously written after the United States had entered the war on 7 April 1917, most likely just prior to the start of the season. There is no evidence that it was ever released (it did not appear in the press). The most telling aspect of this statement is how it demonstrates that the decision to remove Wagner from the repertoire was indeed quickly made. It is also a testament to the indecision that Kahn endured.

⁴⁵ Undated Press Release, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 166, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Until the absolute eleventh hour, Kahn and Gatti-Casazza were preparing for either outcome.⁴⁶

Reactions in the Press

During this period, the press went through three phases of sentiment regarding Wagner. There was an initial belief that an organization such as the Metropolitan Opera would never stoop to such a depth as banning his music. The next phase was that of initial protest once the Metropolitan issued their official statement. They were appalled at the idea of the Metropolitan falling prey to politics. The final phase was that of acquiescence. Though most believed that the idea of cancelling Wagner was absurd, should they have continued to protest the action, they would have been the targets of negative sentiment.

In his column, "General News and Notes in the World of Music," Richard Aldrich praised the Metropolitan for its ability to maintain a balanced repertoire. He also praised the organization for retaining its German personnel without any outward shows of negativity or chauvinism. He stated that, "New York can officially say that art for her as a neutral, officially, knows no bitterness of feeling, and that such things enter not at all

⁴⁶ Not an innocent bystander in this situation, Gatti-Casazza expressed his feelings of distress at eliminating the Wagner, yet acknowledged that this situation was extremely difficult. As much as he may have assumed himself to be an autocrat at the Metropolitan, this situation proved that even he was subject to direct order. Apparently, the decision to abandon the entirety of the German repertory was made over his strenuous objections. While he did not hold Kahn directly responsible, he did resent the timing of the decision. He was somewhat relieved that the responsibility was finally taken from him, but he questioned the hastiness. If the Board of Directors was so strong in their conviction to alter the repertoire, could they not have come to their decision months earlier? In a letter to Kahn, he stated that he could have entirely reorganized the company with the addition of the summer months. Indeed, he had anticipated the situation and had already planned an alternate season should Wagner be canceled. Letter from Giulio Gatti-Casazza to Otto Kahn, 1 November 1917, Otto Kahn Papers, Box 167, Folder 4, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

into the estimate and appreciation of music.”⁴⁷ The tenor of this column is that he seemed to be brimming with pride at the deftness with which the United States was still able to maintain a sense of musical neutrality. And in another article, he stated that the anxiety felt by singers and audiences alike concerning the future of German music was said to be unfounded and that audiences have yet to feel animosity towards the German repertoire.⁴⁸ In general *The New York Times* led the pack in maintaining that there were enough New York opera-goers of German descent and German birth to make the production of German opera profitable.⁴⁹

Once the decision was made and the Metropolitan issued their official statement on 7 November 1917, the press began to register outrage. In an article for *The Bellman* in December of that year, an unnamed author discusses the various outrages perpetrated toward German music and musicians as a result of the angry anti-German mob. The author mentioned the Muck incident, the Kreisler episode, and, finally, the change at the Metropolitan. He attempted to fight the angry-mob mentality by arguing that Wagner’s innate “German-ness” was absurd. The author stated that the *Ring* may be one of the greatest pleas for democracy ever set forth. He added:

The canceling of German music is cheap and childish and goes against the President’s plea to keep in mind the great debt the World owes to the German people and also the very principles that we are fighting for.⁵⁰

Once the initial outrage had subsided into acquiescence, Henry Krehbiel (1854-1923) issued his own statement on the Metropolitan’s decision:

⁴⁷ Richard Aldrich, “General News and Notes in the World of Music,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1915, X5.

⁴⁸ Richard Aldrich, “General News and Notes in the World of Music,” *New York Times*, 22 April 1917, XX2.

⁴⁹ “German Opera, of Course,” *New York Times*, 12 July 1915, 10.

⁵⁰ “Musical Germanophobia,” *The Bellman*, 1 December 1917, 595.

It is a fair presumption, that they also wished that their action should not hurt the feelings of citizens disposed to differentiate between music and morals, or propagandism and patriotism, many of whom loved the ideals embodied in the form of lyric-dramatic art which had been cultivated at the Metropolitan Opera House for an entire generation.⁵¹

Krehbiel had sincerely hoped that events would not lead to this action, but once they had, he fervently hoped that the earlier German repertoire would be restored to its former stature upon the end of the war and the dissipation of the hatred. Once Krehbiel, the shaman of Wagnerites, lent his approval, most of the press fell into line. The main distinction with Krehbiel is that his tone was never antagonistic toward any of the involved parties. This was not always the case.

There were numerous inflammatory articles that absolved the Metropolitan of their action and placed the blame firmly on the shoulders of the German people, whom the following author felt had been treated with the utmost kindness and understanding.

Therein lies the offensiveness of the German opera scheme and the justification for condemning it. More than hundreds of thousands of real Americans have enjoyed those operas in the past, but there is no likelihood that they will do so again until the unrepentant Germans show, as they have not yet shown, at least the beginning of a realization of what a frightful crime Germany committed in 1914, of the hideous atrocities that followed the crime, and of her need to be humble instead of arrogant, and respectful of the world's opinion instead of indifferent to it.⁵²

Once the war seasons had passed and left the Metropolitan unscathed, the press became active again, this time calling for the reinstatement of Wagner. In a 1919 article, Giovanni Almagia, writing in *Musical America*, stated that he felt strongly that the new balance of repertoire was far less than satisfactory. He noted that, even after two years of the altered repertoire, French opera will never be popular. "The peace treaty has been

⁵¹ Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Season Program from the Metropolitan Opera, 1919-1920*, Metropolitan Opera Clipping File, Metropolitan Opera, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁵² "Topics of the Times, Objection is not to the Operas," *New York Times*, 3 March 1919, 1.

signed and it would be nonsense to leave aside such great musical works.” Almagia had originally been an opponent of the German operas because “the German singers and musicians in general deserved a lesson for their haughtiness, but to put aside Wagner and exploit all the mediocrities of the modern French school would be a crime of *lesa arte*.”⁵³ The time for the return of *Die Meistersinger* was nigh.

THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF WAGNER AND *DIE MEISTERSINGER*

“No German had a part in the performance; no word of the German tongue was used.”⁵⁴

It was not until 9 November 1923 that *Die Meistersinger* would return to the Metropolitan stage. It was, however, not the first of Wagner’s operas to return. That honor belonged to *Parsifal* on 19 February 1920. It was a new production, performed in English (with a translation by Henry Krehbiel) by an American cast (with the exception of Artur Bodanzky conducting and Margaret Matzenauer singing Kundry). This was a bold step for the Metropolitan Opera, as wounds were still open from the recent Star Opera Company fiasco.⁵⁵ Great care was taken to reiterate the “non-German-ness” of this performance. In an article in the *Literary Digest* praising the return of Wagner, the author goes to great lengths to qualify the appearance of both Bodanzky and Matzenauer. He emphasized that Bodanzky was Bohemian, while Matzenauer was an Austrian who had been “inoculated with American citizenship.” Wagner needed to be thoroughly sanitized of his German-ness for the performance to be acceptable to a New York

⁵³ Giovanni Almagia, “Italian Editor Raps French Opera and Pleads for Return of Wagner,” *Musical America* 9, August 1919, 35.

⁵⁴ “Wagner Come Again,” *The Literary Digest* 64, 13 March 1920, 33.

⁵⁵ To avoid another controversy, the Lexington Theatre had just made the Chicago Opera Company sign a “No-German” opera guarantee in January 1920.

audience. “It will be many years before American audiences are able to listen to the language of the burners of Louvain with any degree of equanimity.”⁵⁶

In fact, it would only be one year! It was during the 1921/1922 season that the Met, to test the waters, staged a production of *Lohengrin* combining both languages. The principals sang in German while the chorus performed in English. According to the glossy tome *The Met: One Hundred Years of Grand Opera*, “The return of German opera in the German language on the Met stage in 1921 did not provoke.”⁵⁷ There seemed to have been a keen awareness of, or at least a hangover from, the xenophobia of the war years. There was great concern not to trample on the sensitivities of New York audiences to the German language. As Olin Downes of *The New York Times* wrote, “The extension of the German repertory is a symptom of the artistic stabilization which is taking place in this country following the profound distaste for German music and the German language felt during the war.”⁵⁸ Upon the production’s being well received, it was determined that German could return. This would set the stage for the heralded return of *Die Meistersinger*.

The revival of 9 November 1923 featured a new production and a cast that was relatively new to the Met. Only three performers returned after the seven-year absence:

⁵⁶ The issue of Wagner in English is fraught with conflicts. Notoriously difficult to translate, Wagner’s operas are generally seen to be lacking their true spirit when not presented in German. One need only recall the tumult aroused when the Met presented *I Maestri Cantori*. Still, Henry Krehbiel was seen as the best candidate to translate and he was determined to maintain the “proper dignity and elevation” of the text. The translation itself was received with somewhat restrained praise. The other issue besetting the performance was the infamously poor English diction of the largely American cast. “Wagner Come Again,” *The Literary Digest*, 33; “Wagner in English,” *New York Times*, 14 July 1918, 37; Richard Aldrich, “The Opera,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1920, 12; James Gibbons Huneker, “Types,” *New York Times*, 19 January 1919, 44; Louis C. Elson, “Atrocities and Humors of Opera,” *Musical Quarterly* 6, April 1920, 208.

⁵⁷ Martin Mayer, *The Met: One Hundred Years of Grand Opera* (New York: The Metropolitan Opera Guild / Simon & Schuster, 1983): 136.

⁵⁸ Olin Downes, “End of New York’s Opera Season,” *New York Times*, 20 April 1924, X6.

the conductor Artur Bodanzky, Kathleen Howard as Magdalena, and Clarence Whitehall as Hans Sachs. The performance was well-received and indeed, there seemed to be a palpable sense of relief upon its return, a sense that somehow the restoration of this work was a harbinger of a return to normalcy. Lawrence Gilman of the *New-York Tribune* stated, “It is therefore high praise to say of last night's revival of the work at the Metropolitan that at many moments the essential spirit had been apprehended and was conveyed.”⁵⁹ H. C. Colles, the English writer then residing in New York, stated in *The New York Times*, “It ends a period of abstinence and everyone who believes that opera can be something more than an expensive entertainment must be glad of its return.”⁶⁰ W. J. Henderson of the *New York Herald* glowed:

No other lyric drama of Wagner is more difficult to realize on the stage for the reason that this one alone is essentially German in matter and manner. [. . .] The German repertory has been greatly enriched by the revival and the Metropolitan put once more in possession of a work greatly needed in its list.

Henderson’s review is particularly telling in that it addresses, head-on, the issue of the German-ness inherent in *Die Meistersinger*. Henderson also remarked on how the performance captured the “true German spirit” of the work. This view comes at an odd time in the history of *Die Meistersinger* at the Met. It marks a return, albeit briefly, to the celebration (or at least the commemoration) of this work’s nationalistic overtones. This remark would have been improbable a few years earlier, and would prove to be so again fifteen years later.

⁵⁹ Lawrence Gilman, “Wagner’s ‘Meistersinger’ in a Notable Review at the Metropolitan,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 November 1923, 6.

⁶⁰ H.C. Colles, “*Die Meistersinger* Revived,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1923, 17.

DIE MEISTERSINGER AT THE MET AFTER THE WAR

In the decade after the war, the Met settled into a comfortable complacency with regard to *Die Meistersinger*. The work was performed as part of the Metropolitan's offerings every year from 1923 to 1930. On average, it was performed seven times per season (including performances at other venues or on tour), always with the 1923 production. According to the press, the performances were well attended and well received. *Die Meistersinger* had become an anticipated and dependable workhorse. This contrasts with the general state of Wagner at the Met. As previously noted, the operas of Wagner made up 20% of the Met's repertoire before World War I. The second-place composers, Verdi and Puccini, each constituted 13%. After the war, Wagner accounted for only 3% of the total repertoire, with Verdi and Puccini comprising 12% and 19%, respectively. Wagner's percentage would rise a bit during the 1920s but not nearly to the dominance it had before the war. Yet the *Die Meistersinger*, once returned, would remain one of the most performed of Wagner's operas.

That Puccini came into dominance was inevitable. His operas were becoming increasingly popular, and it would be Wagner and Puccini who battled for dominance during the 1920s. During the 1923 revival season of *Die Meistersinger*, Olin Downes wrote:

Yet the composer whose works were given in the greatest number of performances was not Puccini, but Wagner. Wagner, with seven operas, had twenty-nine performances. Puccini came second. He has dismaying strength, since, with only three operas, namely, the incessant *Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Butterfly*, he was heard twenty two times.⁶¹

⁶¹ Olin Downes, "End of New York's Opera Season," *New York Times*, 20 April 1924, X6.

This is not the only reference to the competition between Wagner and Puccini. As Gilman put it, “Gone were the lust and villainies of Scarpia and his sinister Roman drawing-room [. . .] gone as if they had never been; for Wagner's *Meistersinger* had been restored to us, and the most transporting Spring Song in all music was being sung to us again.”⁶² What would eventually come to pass is that Puccini would become the second most performed composer at the Metropolitan (just behind Verdi). Indeed, *La Bohème* is the single most performed opera at the Met.

There were other distinct aspects of the post-World War I period of *Die Meistersinger*. Of particular note was the 1924 Metropolitan Opera debut of Friedrich Schorr (1888-1953) in the role of Hans Sachs. He had performed the role in New York the previous year for the touring German Opera Company,⁶³ but upon that company's closure he turned to the Met. Schorr, the son of a celebrated cantor, became one of the most beloved Wagner singers (and the favored Hans Sachs) during his tenure between the wars, when his popularity reached its zenith.⁶⁴ Of his Hans Sachs, Gilman wrote, “This complex and subtle character came to life under Mr. Schorr's hands and moved before us in humanness and truth.” While *The New York Times*'s Compton Pakenham stated that “his acknowledged excellencies must be taken for granted.”⁶⁵

⁶² Gilman, “Wagner's ‘Meistersinger’ in a Notable Review at the Metropolitan,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 November 1923, 6.

⁶³ The Wagner Opera Company was a short-lived German opera company that had performed at Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House.

⁶⁴ Schorr was specifically chosen to sing the role of Wotan at Bayreuth by Wagner's son Siegfried because of his Jewishness. The festival had been receiving criticism owing to its nationalism and anti-Semitism. Siegfried had hoped that, in selecting Schorr, the festival would be absolved (at least somewhat) of this guilt.

⁶⁵ Gilman, “A Memorable Performance of ‘Die Meistersinger’ at the Metropolitan Matinee,” *New-York Tribune*, 24 February 1924, 18; “Newly Recorded Music: Compton Pakenham, ‘Die Meistersinger’ on Single Disks, Most of Them by Schorr as Hans Sachs,” *New York Times*, 19 February 1933, X8.

Another facet of *Die Meistersinger* in the aftermath of World War I is the make-up of the cast. Gone were the strict rules of only Germans singing German roles. The cast was now far more heterogeneous in its mix, with lead roles sung by Americans, Italians, and Russians. In all, *Die Meistersinger* in post-World War I New York was once again at a high point in its popularity, featuring its most celebrated and diverse casts. Yet, the opera that rejoices in art and praises a pure art bereft of political exigencies was enjoying a fame that would soon diminish as the sentiment towards its subject matter would once again be radically transformed. Within a few years, the opera that had come into question during World War I and had recovered so strongly would be viewed very differently with the coming of World War II.

THE PRECEDENT ESTABLISHED FOR THE NEXT CONFLICT

Given the intense emotions surrounding World War I, it is easy to explain away the wartime actions of the Met. It is easy to rationalize that the Met was subject to both internal and external pressures, and that it ultimately had to make a decision that was most advantageous to itself, or, at the very least, inflicted minimum damage. Yet this decision was not based purely on the constraints of international conflict. Despite the protestations of the Met, it was not a simple choice of nationalism or politics over art. Embroiled in this decision were decades of resentment and old prejudices. The war provided a perfect storm of circumstances into which the banning of Wagner and *Die Meistersinger* seemed excusable, if not necessary. While it is true that both Kahn and Gatti-Casazza labored over their course of action, ultimately the deed was done once Kahn began exploring the negation of the singers' contracts in 1915. At that point it was

just a matter of finding the most opportune time (which would conveniently come in two years).

What is most telling, however, is the disconnect between public statement and private practice, both before and after the war. When Gatti-Casazza returned *Parsifal* to the repertoire, he triumphantly (and without irony) stated,

Let us acknowledge the truth. And at the same time let us say in no uncertain tone that no war, no human stupidity, no contumacy can obscure the fact that Richard Wagner created a new musical world which no force ever can destroy or depreciate—a world which exists for the enjoyment of lovers of the theatre. If one considers the combination of gifts with which he has succeeded in achieving, beyond all doubt Wagner was the greatest man that the theatre ever produced [. . .] It will not be performed either as a social or religious function; no, but as a function truly artistic, and it will evoke emotions profound and pure such as the rarest scenic-musical spectacles can possibly awaken.⁶⁶

In other words, Wagner is great and his art transcends human conflict unless his art proves too inconvenient for management. During this entire episode the Met issued statement after statement, either as official press releases or, more informally, through spokesmen (including even Kahn and Gatti-Casazza), that the repertoire would not be altered. Art is above petty politics and hysterics. Yet all the while Kahn and Gatti-Casazza plotted the opposite course of action. Then, in the ultimate demonstration of this disconnect, they issued a statement praising themselves on their fortitude to return to the repertoire the very composer they had conspired to cancel all along.

This irony becomes all the more poignant when we consider the very narrative of *Die Meistersinger*, the work that lauds art above all else. It is worthwhile to ask if Kahn and Gatti-Casazza understood this. Further, would the actions of these men and this organization prove to be a deterrent the next time? Would art be held to a higher standard and not made to collapse in the face of political pressure?

⁶⁶ “Music Drama Returns,” *New York Times*, 15 February 1920, XX4.

While the answer is already known, what is little understood is the fact that in 1939, Edward Johnson, General Manager of the Met, would act in precisely the same manner regarding *Die Meistersinger* (and only *Die Meistersinger*). Nearly replicating the actions of Kahn and Gatti-Casazza, Johnson would present a convincing front of art above nationalities, simultaneously remove the nationalistic *Meistersinger*, and then upon the opera's return to the stage, issue a self-glorifying statement praising the Met's tolerance in the face of an international conflict. What is different is that Johnson's actions were far more secretive than those of Gatti-Casazza and Kahn. Johnson did not issue a press release announcing the removal of *Die Meistersinger*. He just silently banished it.

With the understanding that the precedent for Johnson's actions had been set two decades earlier, it is time to turn to *Die Meistersinger*, the Met, and World War II.

PART II

***DIE MEISTERSINGER* AND WORLD WAR II,
AN EXAMINATION OF THE POLITICS
OF A CANCELLED OPERA**

CHAPTER 3

THE MOST GERMAN OPERA

*Die Meistersinger is the
incarnation of our national identity*¹

*Die Meistersinger is one of the most
typically German of all German
dramatic works.*²

During the decade leading up to World War II, the reception of *Die Meistersinger* underwent dramatic changes, these reflecting the upheaval occurring in both Europe and, eventually, the United States. As we saw in Chapter 2, *Die Meistersinger* had, by the end of the 1920s, regained its popularity at the Met following the ban of Wagner during World War I. Indeed, Wagner's operas had recovered from their expulsion and had been virtually restored to their former position of prominence. Yet by the end of the 1930s, the status of *Die Meistersinger* was again in question. With the gathering storm in Europe, long-dormant issues arising from the opera's strong nationalist tenor were coming into the foreground, and with the rise of the National Socialists in Germany and their co-opting of this work, questions arose regarding its appropriateness. Had *Die Meistersinger* once again become too "German" for New York audiences?

This chapter will study the response to and perception of this nationalism as they played out for pre-World War II New York audiences and the Metropolitan Opera. What

¹ Quoted after Thomas Grey, "Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as National German Opera," in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 95. See also Helmut Strauss, *Hitler's Bayreuth—The Bayreuth Festival during the 'Third Reich'*, paper presented at the New School University, New York, 2004; and Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 165.

² "'Die Meistersinger' at Metropolitan," *New York Times*, 27 March 1910, 11.

will be seen—to look ahead for just a moment—is that the change in the perception of the nationalism would have dire consequences for the opera in the 1940s.

THE TENOR CHANGES IN THE 1930s

This tumultuous decade was marked by the rise of fascism in Europe and a catastrophic economic downturn in both the United States and abroad. Further, there were changes in the way that artistic institutions functioned and were maintained. This great, multi-faceted upheaval contributed to the conditions under which the popularity of *Die Meistersinger* would shift.

The beginning of the decade was marked by the deaths of two titans of Wagner opera. On 1 April 1930, Cosima Wagner, the driving force behind the Bayreuth Festival after the composer's death, finally passed away after a prolonged illness. As the protector of his legacy, it was she who dictated the policies of the Festivals. Under Cosima, the Festival thrived. She retired in 1908 and placed the Festival in the care of her son, Siegfried, who had tirelessly stewarded the Festival through the recovery years after World War I. By 1930, the Festival and the family had achieved sustained success. It was then a sudden and tragic loss when, in August of 1930, Siegfried Wagner died from a combination of heart disease and pneumonia (inauspiciously timed at the beginning of the Festival).³ As Benjamin Grosbayn of *The New York Times* put it: “Siegfried, last of the Wagner triumvirate, has joined his father and mother in Valhalla.”⁴

³ It was Siegfried who had secured the financial footing of the Festival after World War I. As part of his effort, he mounted a tour of the United States in 1924—including a long stay in New York—in an effort to raise funds. This visit was organized in part by Metropolitan Opera Board members Otto Kahn and Clarence MacKay. “Siegfried Wagner Dies at Age 61,” *New York Times*, 5 August 1930, 17.

⁴ Benjamin Grosbayne, “Siegfried Wagner: Shock of Mother's Death and Preparations for Baireuth Festival Hastened End,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1930, 99.

Yet before he died he stipulated that the Festival go on as scheduled with *Die Meistersinger* as the opener.⁵ Further, his will dictated that the entire Wagner estate, including control of the Festival, be left to his English-born wife Winifred.⁶

The significance of Siegfried Wagner's death echoes through the events soon to come. By 1930, Adolf Hitler had been an honored guest at Villa Wahnfried, the Wagner residence. What is interesting, however, is that the fascination with Hitler seemed to stem not from Siegfried, but from Winifred. Siegfried seemed ambivalent, if not reluctant, about any alliance between the Festival and Hitler.⁷ One wonders what would have transpired had Siegfried not collapsed during rehearsals for *Die Meistersinger* in August 1930. Would the strong association between the Wagner family, the Festival, and Hitler have become as deeply entrenched if Winifred had been relegated to a supporting role as opposed to that of director? Most importantly, to what extent would *Die Meistersinger* have become a key component of the Nazi myth had Siegfried lived?

In New York, upon assuming the podium at Lewisohn Stadium at City College on

⁵ At Hans Sachs's speech, which closes the opera, the mournful crowd stood and sang, "Deutschland, über alles." "Siegfried Wagner Dies at Age 61," 17.

⁶ There are many ironies embedded in the histories of Richard Wagner, his family, and the Bayreuth Festival. This particular irony lay in the fact that for the second time its short history, the Festival—that ultimate tribute to German *volk* and German art—was to be led by a foreign-born woman.

⁷ See Jonathan Carr, *The Wagner Clan* (New York: Grove Press, 2007). This sweeping study covers the history of the Wagner family beginning with Siegfried Wagner's birth in Switzerland in 1869 through the present, with particular focus given to World War I and World War II. Carr makes the convincing case that Winifred was enamored with Hitler from their first meeting in 1924, while her husband was far less so. Carr also furthers the legend of Winifred smuggling writing paper to Hitler while he was in prison, something that has always been in contention. In all, Carr's book serves as a rebuke to Nike Wagner's *The Wagners: The Drama of a Musical Dynasty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Nike Wagner, the grand-daughter of Winifred by her son Wieland, attempts to clear the Wagner name by deflecting any alliance with the Nazis as being politically and financially exigent. Rebuking her cousin Gottfried Wagner's *Twilight of the Wagners: The Unveiling of a Family Legacy* (New York: Picador, 1997), she states that Winifred's seeming infatuation with Hitler was merely a cover necessitated by the political reality of the time—Winifred needed the support of Hitler to continue the Festival during the war.

4 August 1930, Albert Coates quietly announced that Siegfried Wagner had died and led the New York Philharmonic in “Siegfried’s Funeral March” from *Götterdämmerung*. Coates said: “It is a strange thing this, playing the funeral music by the father for the son. Siegfried was a great personality and a leader in musical thought for decades.”⁸ At the Met, however, there was little fanfare in commemorating Siegfried’s death: many Board members were abroad for the summer and the 1930/31 season was still some months away. Indeed, the Metropolitan Opera was about to embark on one of the most turbulent decades in its already chaotic existence.

The Metropolitan Opera During the 1930s

The 1930s brought about great changes to the Met. The beginning of the decade saw the transition from the dysfunctional management model of two ruling bodies, the Metropolitan Real Estate Company and the Metropolitan Opera Company to a more workable method. There was also a changing of the guard. The first major change was the retirement in 1932 of Otto Kahn, President of the Metropolitan Opera Company, who, despite his contentious relationship with Metropolitan Real Estate Company, had orchestrated many of the Met’s successes at the beginning of the twentieth century. He had also guided the Met through World War I and the 1920s. Moreover, it was Kahn who had been instrumental in the decision to cancel Wagner’s operas during the war. His retirement created a power vacuum, which caused great unease. The second major change came in 1935, with the retirement of long-time Musical Director and Kahn ally Giulio Gatti-Casazza. It would take a few years until the dust settled from the departure of these two men.

⁸ “Siegfried’s Dirge Played at Stadium,” *New York Times*, 5 August 1930, 30.

In addition to the internal pressures relating to management changes, the economic downturn had its effect on the way in which the Met could do business. Writing in 1932, Olin Downes of *The New York Times* stated: “It was a winter full of problems and vicissitudes. [. . .] The surplus of former years has been eaten up by the deficits of the season past.”⁹ The bulk of the Met’s operating income had come from the assessment on the boxes in the so-called Golden Horseshoe. The ticket sales to the general population had largely been a secondary source of income. Owing to the 1929 crash, the pool of funds from assessments had greatly diminished, and the Met had been operating with a deficit. Further, the theater itself, the so-called Yellow Brick Brewery, had been in decline. All previous attempts to procure a new facility had failed.¹⁰ Ultimately, the Met would have to shift its focus away from appeasing the high society types (who had long held sway) to a more “consumer” based model. As Irving Kolodin wrote in *The Story of the Metropolitan Opera*: “The Met would have to be a home for opera rather than of social display.”¹¹

Awareness of the need for a change can be seen in a letter dated 30 August 1932 from Chairman Paul Drennan Cravath to Edward Ziegler, the Met’s Assistant General Manager. It was a confidential letter regarding the general direction of the Met and begins with a warning:

I think it is better that you should not show this letter or report to Mr. Gatti-Casazza or any member of your organization, but rather treat it as entirely confidential to yourself.

⁹ Olin Downes, “The End of an Epoch: New York's Opera Enters Period of Transition as Season Closes,” *New York Times* 17 April 1932, X7.

¹⁰ Otto Kahn himself had invested \$100,000 to buy a new facility but was subsequently blocked.

¹¹ Irving Kolodin, *The Story of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1950: A Candid History* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1953), 387.

The letter then follows:

For a long time we of the Metropolitan have been patting ourselves on the back and assuring ourselves that we were giving the best opera in the world. Maybe we have been right in doing so, but I doubt it. At all events, it seems to me that some time in the next few years an effort must be made to introduce life in the production of opera in New York. We have been for some years sliding along very smoothly in a groove, and to get out of that groove will involve a wrench and perhaps some temporary confusion; but the end may bring fresh life and vitality. [. . .] I think one trouble with us at the Metropolitan is that we assume that critics of our performances are either ‘incompetent, or incorrectly informed, or in bad faith’ which often is not the case.”¹²

With the last statement, Cravath was quoting Gatti-Casazza, who had stated that any dissenting critics were “incompetent, or incorrectly informed, or in bad faith.”

Though Kahn and Gatti-Casazza can fairly be called trusted leaders, there were, toward the end of their era, many who believed that the Met needed to strike out in new directions. Thus while their departure was fraught with unease, there were those who saw it as fortuitous.

But while the beginning of the 1930s was marked by the departure of Kahn and Gatti-Casazza, crippling deficits, and management issues, the end of this decade would be celebrated as the beginning of the regime of a new General Manager, Edward Johnson. He would steward the Met into a more secure financial footing, orchestrate the purchase of the theater from the Real Estate Company, and subsequently facilitate the dissolution of that Company altogether.

¹² Letter from Paul Drennan Cravath to Edward Ziegler, August 30, 1932, Edward Johnson Collection, 1932 Folder, University of Guelph Archives, University of Guelph Library.

Edward Johnson

With the retirement of Gatti-Casazza in 1935, the Board had briefly considered promoting Assistant General Manager Edward Ziegler to the post of General Manager, but in the end decided upon Herbert Witherspoon.¹³ However, Witherspoon suffered a major heart attack and died on 10 May 1935 while in a meeting with Ziegler only two weeks after Gatti-Casazza's departure. Olin Downes wrote:

Mr. Witherspoon, confronted with immense difficulties and many conflicting elements of a complicated situation following Mr. Gatti-Casazza's departure, literally worked himself to death in a few weeks' time, endeavoring to make effective the policies to which he was committed.¹⁴

Yet in his short tenure (six weeks), he had already initiated some reforms to ease the Met's problems. The statement released by the Met upon his appointment read: "He plans to improve the company in every way possible at this time [. . .]"¹⁵ It was imperative to continue with Witherspoon's reforms. In a telegram to the board dated May 1935, Chairman Paul Cravath swore he would:

[. . .] Carry on Mr. Witherspoon's design already so auspiciously conceived and with the invaluable counsel of Mr. Edward Ziegler and the cooperation of Mr. Earle Lewis. I pledge my zealous devotion to its fulfillment and to the maintenance of the uninterrupted prestige of the Metropolitan Opera.¹⁶

¹³ Witherspoon had been a former Metropolitan bass specializing in Wagner. After an esteemed singing career he became the Artistic Director of the Chicago Civic Opera Company and was hired by the Met to be the General Manager soon after.

¹⁴ Olin Downes, "New Opera Set-Up: Johnson Named General Manager of Metropolitan," *New York Times*, 19 May 1935, X5.

¹⁵ "Witherspoon Dies In Office At Opera On Eve of Sailing," *New York Times*, 11 May 1935, 1.

¹⁶ Western Union Telegram from Paul Drennan Cravath to Board of Directors, 1935, Edward Johnson Collection, 1935 Folder, University of Guelph Archives, University of Guelph Library.

Within days of Witherspoon's death, the Board appointed Edward Johnson to the position of General Manager. Johnson, a Toronto native, had been a successful Metropolitan tenor who had already worked as an Assistant Manager alongside Edward Ziegler.¹⁷ Upon his appointment, Johnson said, "It is premature for me to make a statement, but Mr. Witherspoon had everything set to go, and I shall endeavor to take up his plans and carry them out as an honor to him and an obligation to ourselves."¹⁸ Johnson inherited a skyrocketing deficit, unreliable income, a decrepit facility, and a stable of singers not yet signed to return. Before he retired, Gatti-Casazza had attempted to alleviate the income problem by securing a \$150,000 underwriting from the Juilliard Music Foundation in exchange for a share in control of policy, but this was temporary salve.¹⁹ To stabilize the Company's income, Johnson initiated a series of programs designed to appeal to a greater audience without alienating the Met's original base. He oversaw the establishment of the Metropolitan Opera Guild, an organization whose main purpose was public outreach. In what has been referred to as the "democratization of the opera," Johnson succeeding in realizing that wider audience. In a 1934 response to a

¹⁷ The two men enjoyed a collegial relationship. Ziegler, known for his wry humor, had once stated in a handwritten note to Johnson, "Dear Eddie, Now will you have to use cold compresses to reduce the size of your cranium before entering the Opera House?" Letter from Edward Ziegler to Edward Johnson, 27 February 1932, Edward Johnson Collection, 1932 Folder, University of Guelph Archives, University of Guelph Library.

¹⁸ "To Carry on Witherspoon Ideas," *New York Times* 16 May 1935, 3.

¹⁹ During the previous season, there had been rumors that the Met would be dark without an influx of funds. During the season previous to that, it had launched a successful campaign to raise public money. Gatti-Casazza and Ziegler had been reluctant to pursue that course of action again. Another proposed solution had been to merge the New York Philharmonic with the Metropolitan Opera, but Arturo Toscanini had prevented that. In an eleventh-hour deal, the Juilliard School of Music had established the Juilliard Foundation that would fund the season. The deal stipulated that a trustee of the Foundation would be appointed to the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera Association. H. Howard Taubman, "In New Opera Regime Opens With All the Old Splendor," *New York Times* 17 December 1935, 1; "Opera to Carry on Without Public Aid," *New York Times*, 28 February 1934, 1.

letter from music critic J. W. Henderson, who had stated that opera was on the wane, Johnson replied that it was in its Renaissance.²⁰

Over the next five years, Johnson accomplished the seemingly impossible tasks of restructuring the management/ownership model of the Met and establishing a consumer-based approach to ticket sales and repertoire. As a result, he was able to orchestrate the purchase of the theatre from the Real Estate Company and shift the bulk of decision-making to the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company. With this last move, Johnson was able to dissolve the Real Estate Company and streamline the operations. Gone were the days of two governing groups working at cross-purposes.

Of Johnson's first season, then mayor Fiorello LaGuardia telegrammed, "You have rendered a splendid public service in bringing fine opera within the reach of every one. [. . .] You are doing fine work. Bravo."²¹ Olin Downes continued the praise: "Mr. Johnson, working under great difficulties and handicaps, has admirable tact, judgment, and executive ability."²² Johnson had a knack for choosing the most profitable repertoire. And by far, Wagner, as in the past, proved to be the most popular, profitable, and favorably reviewed. In the same review, Downes continued:

In general, the Wagner operas, and not those of Verdi and Puccini, became the Metropolitan's trump card this season—a card which Mr. Johnson played with perspicacity. [. . .] The public interest in Wagner has been mounting remarkably in the last ten years. Time was when it was hard, in this city, to give away a pair of tickets for "Tristan and Isolde." Performances of that opera were for the substantial but not overwhelmingly numerous Wagnerian public. But when Mr. Johnson augmented the number of Wagner performances given in the regular subscriptions and in the special

²⁰ Letter from Edward Johnson to J.W. Henderson, 21 March 1934, Edward Johnson Collection, 1934 Folder, University of Guelph Archives, University of Guelph Library.

²¹ Telegram from Fiorello La Guardia to Edward Johnson, 12 May 1936, Edward Johnson Collection, 1936 Folder, University of Guelph Archives, University of Guelph.

²² Olin Downes, "Metropolitan Review: First Season Under Edward Johnson's Direction Comes to an End," *New York Times*, 22 March 1936, X5.

Wagner matinees by a popular-priced Saturday evening cycle of the “Ring” the response was astounding.²³

Johnson was able to increase the company’s profitability by serving up Wagner to a new audience. It is within this state of affairs that *Die Meistersinger* would thrive.

**GERMAN NATIONALISM AND APPROPRIATION OF *DIE MEISTERSINGER*
BY THE THIRD REICH AS SEEN IN NEW YORK CITY
AND BY THE METROPOLITAN OPERA**

*Drum sag' ich Euch: ehrt Eure deutschen Meister!
Dann bannt Ihr gute Geister;
und gebt Ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst, zerging' in Dunst
das heil'ge röm'sche Reich, uns bliebe gleich
die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!*²⁴

The concept of “Holy German art” and Wagner’s plea via Hans Sachs to “honor your German masters” is at the root of much of the angst toward this work. If we consider this within the original context of its 1868 premiere in Munich, in a country still three years shy of its hard-fought unification, during an era when hyper-nationalism was common, the ideas espoused in this text seem far less sinister. Yet when viewed within the context of a celebrated symbol of a regime whose brutal ascension was second only to its singular strive toward ethnic purity and world power, these words take on a more menacing tone. This work contains multi-layered, musical and structural references to German art and German culture.²⁵ Whether or not Hitler understood all of the nuanced

²³ Downes, “Metropolitan Review,” X5.

²⁴ “Therefore I say to you: honor your German Masters, then you will conjure up good spirits! And if you favor their endeavors, even if the Holy Roman Empire should dissolve in mist, for us there would yet remain holy German Art!” Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Act III, Scene 5, Piano-Vocal score (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1970): 559-563.

²⁵ See Thomas Grey, “*Die Meistersinger* in the Culture and Politics of German Nationalism,” *Leitmotive, Journal of Wagner Society of Northern California* 18 (Spring 2004), 2-7. See also “Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* as National German Opera (1868-1945),” *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

references is immaterial. Also immaterial is the fact that in Germany, the popularity of this work was actually on the wane during the 1920s (in stark contrast to its continuing population in the United States and in New York City). Yet with *Die Meistersinger*, Hitler found a ready-made mythology: an easily manipulated tool to convey German superiority. With “Drum sag' ich euch: ehrt Eure deutschen Meister,” Hitler found a call to arms: if *Die Meistersinger* could be used as a rallying cry for German unification by invoking the glorious culture of the Holy Roman Empire, then it could also be used as effectively toward justifying and legitimizing the Third Reich, which was supposed to be the reincarnation of the Holy Roman Empire and similarly last 1,000 years.

Once again, the purpose of this study is not to discuss the nationalism of this work vis-à-vis the Third Reich, but rather to engage that point at which the Third Reich's appropriation of this work and its nationalism intersect with the Metropolitan Opera and its New York City audiences. This point begs the question: did New York audiences know about the Nazi's appropriation of this work? What did the Metropolitan Opera and Edward Johnson know? And finally, when did the nationalism become too strong to simply ignore? In all, just when and for whom did *Die Meistersinger* become too German?

The Press Coverage of the Third Reich's Use of Die Meistersinger

A nation has always consisted of the aggregate value of its great men. We Germans may claim that our great men have not only established and augmented the worth of our own people, but have made an imperishable contribution to the mental and cultural life of the whole world. Among those embodying the best there is in the German people, and rising from national to transcendent greatness was Richard Wagner, the greatest native of

2002): 78-104. Grey engages all of the nationalistic references within *Die Meistersinger* and places them in historical contexts that show that *Die Meistersinger* has constantly been co-opted by any number of different factions eager to exploit its nationalism.

Leipzig and the mightiest master of German music [. . .] a man who embodied the best qualities of our people.²⁶

It is easy to look upon this time with the insight that only comes with eighty years of distance. When considering the place of *Die Meistersinger* within the culture of the Third Reich, absolutes come to mind: that this work was monolithic in the Third Reich's propaganda machine, that it was Hitler's favorite, etc. That these may be true is not in question. There is a sense of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* when considering this episode: Hitler liked it, thus it is bad. One need only look to images of Leni Reienstahl's 1935 propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* as mitigating evidence in favor of shelving the work.²⁷ However, it is not quite so simplistic, and an understanding of the appropriation as witnessed by New York audiences is needed. More importantly, we need to ascertain when New York audiences and the Metropolitan Opera became aware of the appropriation.

It is apparent from a careful reading of the press that New Yorkers were informed about the Third Reich's use of *Die Meistersinger* throughout the decade. As *Die Meistersinger* became part of the Third Reich's ritualistic celebration and legitimization of itself, the work became central to many major Third Reich events. At each of these, the high point was often marked by a special presentation of *Die Meistersinger*. There

²⁶ Adolf Hitler's self-styled eulogy at the laying of the foundation stone at the Wagner memorial in Leipzig. "Wagner is Eulogized by Reich Chancellor," *New York Times*, 7 March 1934, 4; "Hitler Eulogizes Wagner for Cultural Contribution," *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 March 1934, 15.

²⁷ This film prominently features the "Wach' auf" chorus from Act III performed as a gentle instrumental piece. It shows the second morning of the 1934 Nuremberg Rally. Images of a beautiful Bavarian morning complete with beatific children gracefully give way to swastikas. The message is clear: it is the dawn of a new and better Third Reich. However, this film had no influence in the United States during the 1930s as it was not shown commercially in this country until 1960, and the German release was not covered in the American press. "Nazi Movie Draws Throng at Theatre," *New York Times*, 28 June 1960, 26.

were two distinct types of Third Reich events that used *Die Meistersinger*: the first were the Third Reich-specific celebrations such as the Nuremberg Rallies; the second consisted of non-Germany-specific events that were manipulated into becoming celebrations of the Third Reich, such as the 1936 Olympics, official state visits, and most importantly, the Bayreuth Festivals.²⁸

By 1930 the association between Hitler and the Wagner family was already apparent and gained coverage in the New York press. New York dailies covered the activities of Hitler and his relationship to the Wagner family beginning with Siegfried Wagner's funeral in August 1930.²⁹ According to one report, Hitler attended the funeral as an honored guest, and his Brown Shirts marched behind the family during the procession.³⁰ At this time, there were also American correspondents and writers in Germany covering the Wagner family, the Bayreuth Festival, and the relationship of both to Adolf Hitler and thus providing another avenue through which news filtered back to the United States.

²⁸ One example was the official state visit of Prince Regent Paul of Yugoslavia in 1939. Following a bombastic parade of 25,000 troops, Hitler "entertained his guests at a gala performance of his favorite opera, Wagner's 'Die Meistersinger' at the State Opera House." Otto D. Tolischus, "Hitler Displays His Army for Paul," *New York Times*, 3 June 1939, 2. Hitler also exported the ritual use of *Die Meistersinger* to occupied countries. At the 1938 Salzburg Festival in recently occupied Austria, Hitler insisted upon a Furtwängler-conducted *Meistersinger*. The previous conductor, Bruno Walter, had been ousted owing to the recent Jewish purge. Toscanini, who had painstakingly raised funds for the festival, refused to conduct. The *New York Times* correspondent stated, "Swastikas predominated in the city's gay decorations as the festival of Arturo Toscanini, Bruno Walter and Max Reinhardt yielded its place to the Salzburg of Adolf Hitler." "Salzburg Festival is Opened by Nazis," *New York Times*, 24 July 1938, 20; "Overseas Items," *New York Times*, 17 July 1938, 122.

²⁹ "Wagner's Son Dies," *New York Daily News*, 5 August 1930, 13; "Siegfried Wagner Tribute Given at Stadium Concert," *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 August 1930, 14; "Wagner's Son Siegfried Dies at Bayreuth," *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 August 1930, 19; "Wagner Estate 'And Traditions' Left to Widow," *New York Herald Tribune*, 6 August 1930, 19.

³⁰ "All Reich Honors Wagner in Leipzig," *New York Times* 13 February 1933, 4.

The first major event that wed the Third Reich with *Die Meistersinger* was the fiftieth anniversary of Richard Wagner's death in 1933. Karl Muck, the disgraced former conductor of the Boston Symphony, conducted the "Vorspiel" from *Die Meistersinger* at the ceremony.³¹ However, the bigger news of this event was the rumored betrothal between Winifred Wagner and Adolf Hitler. The *New York Daily News* even quoted a grandniece of Winifred's who stated that she "wouldn't be surprised at some late date to see Herr Hitler and Frau Wagner married."³² Rumors aside, the ceremony was a lavish affair attended by Hitler, Hermann Goering, Schwerin von Krosigk (Minister of Finance), and with Winifred and Wieland Wagner as the guests of honor.³³ The *New York Times* focused their coverage on the friendship between recently deceased Siegfried and Hitler (which has since been disproven, or at very least, discredited), even using the word, "chums" to describe their relationship.³⁴

Indeed, 1933 proved to be a watershed year in the Nazi's appropriation of *Die Meistersinger* and its subsequent coverage in the New York and American press. The quick succession of events in Germany began with the appointment of Hitler as Reich Chancellor in January, followed soon thereafter by the *Reichstag* Fire and its snowball effect culminating in the consolidation of power for the Nazi party in April of that year. With this ascension to absolutism, the remainder of the year was spent providing bread and circuses—the Bayreuth Festival among them—in which *Die Meistersinger* was one of the major symbols of Third Reich superiority.

³¹ After Muck's release from his United States engagements just prior to World War I (see also Chapter 2), he went on to enjoy a successful career in Germany.

³² "Hitler Disappoints Match-Making Gossip," *New York Daily News*, 13 February 1933, 2.

³³ "Hitler-Wagner Troth is Likely," *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 February 1933, 1. Though it is unlikely that they ever became engaged, Winifred was a long-time member of the Nazi party.

³⁴ "All Reich Honors Wagner in Leipzig," *New York Times*, 13 February 1933, 4.

The Bayreuth Festivals

From 1933 until 1939 Hitler co-opted the Bayreuth Festival and transformed it into a celebration of the Nazi culture with enormous Nazi banners and flags draped from the theatre. Otto Tolischus of *The New York Times* wrote, “And the Wagner Festivals at Baireuth have been raised by Hitler to a sacrificial rite.”³⁵ In July 1933 *Die Meistersinger* inaugurated the Festival. Heinz Tietjen staged a costly and lavish new production featuring Max Lorenz as Walther, Karl Elmendorff at the podium (standing in for Toscanini), and a cast of 700 choristers to take part in the Act III finale. It was a triumphant occasion as thousands were said to have lined the road leading up to the theater in the hope of catching a glimpse of Hitler.³⁶ The mayor of Bayreuth had also encouraged the townspeople to decorate with the official colors of red and black.³⁷ Writers from both the *New York Herald Tribune* and *New York Daily News* noted that the Festival had now become an official instrument of the German government,³⁸ while a column entitled “What is Art” in *The New York Times* states:

In the works of Wagner the German people pay devotion to art at its highest, whose mission it is to raise men above hates and fears and cruelties and mean motives and party passions into an atmosphere of universal sympathy and universal understanding.³⁹

³⁵ Otto D. Tolischus, “Nine Muses Regimented to Serve Nazi Kultur,” *New York Times*, 22 August 1937, SM4.

³⁶ Hitler was reported to have demurred any outward displays of Nazi nationalism despite the already gaudy display. He even reportedly had requested that “Deutschland über Alles” not be sung—as had been done during a 1924 Bayreuth performance—so as not to distract from the “Master”. “Bayreuth Hails Jewish Artist and Hitler Too,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 22 July 1933, 6; Herbert F. Peyser, “Baireuth Honors Hitler,” *New York Times*, 22 July 1933, 14.

³⁷ Theodore Peyser, “Wagner Festival in Baireuth Today,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1933, 20.

³⁸ “Bayreuth Hails Jewish Artist and Hitler Too,” 6; “Elmendorf Opens Bayreuth Festival,” *New York Daily News*, 22 July 1933, 25.

³⁹ “What is Art?” *New York Times*, 23 July 1933, E4.

Yet Herbert Peyser, writing for *The New York Times*, from Bayreuth observed:

With the swastika banner floating from the roof of Richard Wagner's theatre, and with Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, Wilhelm Frick and other high officials of the Nazi government sitting as guests of the Wagner family, while a guard of honor stood at rigid attention before the Festspielhaus and Brown Shirts guarded the entrance with scowling looks and menacing rifles, the Baireuth Festival got underway today with a performance of 'Die Meistersinger'.⁴⁰

For a later performance he declared, "Two things stand out—the mediocrity of performances as a whole and the unmitigated attempt, through sophistry and propaganda, to identify Richard Wagner with Nazidom and all its works."⁴¹ The press coverage of the Festival extended beyond the New York dailies and into the national press. *Time* prominently featured a story entitled "Nazi Bayreuth." In it, the reporter covered much of the same information as in the New York press but with a larger sense of spectacle:

Swastika banners hung from Frau Winifred Wagner's Villa Wahnfried, drooped over the street as Chancellor Hitler drove through cheering Fascist crowds. Scowling Brown Shirts, rifle at shoulder, guarded the entrance of the refurbished Festspielhaus. It was Nazi Day at Bayreuth. Despite Hitler's prohibition of demonstrations 'not pertaining to Wagner's immortal music,' Karl Elmendorff's flat, insipid conducting of 'Die Meistersinger' could not conceal the fact that Nazi Germany was again parading its national resurgence.⁴²

What is particularly telling in this article is that it places *Die Meistersinger* at the center of this Nazi-driven, German "national resurgence," if not as an integral part of it. This immediately (and irrevocably) married *Die Meistersinger* to the Third Reich in the minds of many Americans; it would now be the *de facto* opera of Third Reich culture.

⁴⁰ Herbert F. Peyser, "Baireuth Honors Hitler," 14. In a review of a later performance, Peyser stated that the chorus of 700 was a "Meyerbeerian stunt." Peyser, "Festival At Baireuth," *New York Times* 13 August 1933, X4.

⁴¹ Peyser, "Festival At Baireuth," X4.

⁴² "Nazi Bayreuth," *Time* 22, 31 July 1933, 34. One amusing aspect of this article is that it focuses on the "rumored engagement" between Winifred and Adolf Hitler. While these rumors had already made the rounds in the New York press, they had been largely discounted by this time.

This became “official” the following month, when the August 6 performance was broadcast to New York audiences on WJZ. It was during the intermission between Acts I and II that Joseph Goebbels made his now infamous speech, “Wagner and the Contemporary Sense of Art,” in which he declared *Die Meistersinger* to be the “incarnation of our national identity.”⁴³ Thus the idea of *Die Meistersinger*’s place within the Third Reich became an unambiguous truth. With Goebbels’s declaration and the accompanying radio broadcast plus the extensive press coverage of the Festival began the negative reception of this work in this country.

The Bayreuth Festival would always accentuate this association during the years that followed. The 1934 Festival was covered as extensively as that of 1933. The tenor of the coverage was similar as well. *The New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, and *New York Herald Tribune* (among others) all mentioned Hitler, Wagner, Bayreuth, and *Die Meistersinger* in their headlines. The main focus was the “Nazification” of the Festival, with more than one report referring to Richard Wagner and *Die Meistersinger* as merely “window dressing.”⁴⁴ Another article likened the Festival to the recent Nazi rally at Nuremberg.⁴⁵ *Time* once again covered the event with a glossy spread entitled “Hitler Over Bayreuth,” but chose to focus on the now-discounted, rumored betrothal of Adolf Hitler and Winifred Wagner.⁴⁶ The same lavish Heinz Tietjen production was presented. As to the performance (and specifically, the reception of the Hans Sachs’s final speech), Herbert Peyser stated:

⁴³ “Baireuth to Broadcast Today,” *New York Times*, 6 August 1933, N1.

⁴⁴ Peyser, “Hitler Eclipses Opera in Baireuth,” *New York Times*, 23 July 1934; Peyser, “Wagner Today at Baireuth,” *New York Times*, 19 August 1934, X4.

⁴⁵ “Baireuth is Filled by Nazi Troopers,” *New York Times* 22 July 1934, 7.

⁴⁶ “Hitler Over Bayreuth,” *Time* 23, 1 August 1934, 78.

There was much enthusiasm after each act and a tremendous demonstration at the close of the opera at Hans Sachs's address about German art, which Bockelmann [Hans Sachs], after the manner of many German singers today, delivered like a mortal threat or a soapbox orator's fulminations [. . .] Adolf Hitler, in the Wagner box, listened to the passage with an abstracted look on his face.⁴⁷

The press coverage would be similar throughout the remainder of the decade. There was always the seemingly unending supply of pro-Wagner/Hitler literature that caused Olin Downes to remark: "Baireuth has become exclusively a national Festival [. . .] One would even think from some of the literature on sale hereabouts that Wagner had been discovered by Hitler and by him revealed."⁴⁸ Most major New York papers emphasized the overarching Nazi control of the Festival rather than the Festival itself. And all mentioned the esteemed position that *Die Meistersinger* held within it. All seemed to agree on one fact: with the use of *Die Meistersinger*, the Festival had become merely a trick of Nazi propaganda. It would remain so until the temporary disbanding of the Festival in 1939.

1936 Berlin Olympics

With the manipulation of the Third Reich, the 1936 Berlin Olympics were transformed from a peaceful showpiece of athleticism into yet another tool for Nazi propaganda. In an arena built specifically for this event, and with huge Nazi banners flowing, the visiting countries could hardly help but wonder at the might of their host country. In a carefully choreographed opening, Hitler marched into the stadium accompanied by the opening music from Act III, Scene 5, the "Guild March," from *Die*

⁴⁷ Peyser, "Baireuth Returns to 'Meistersinger'," *New York Times*, 24 July 1934, 20. In a review of this performance, Peyser referred to the 700 plus person finale as a "a cross between Meyerbeer and Ziegfeld." Peyser, "Wagner Today at Baireuth," *New York Times*, 19 August 1934, X4.

⁴⁸ Downes, "'Lohengrin' Opens Fete at Baireuth," *New York Times* 20 July 1936, 10.

Meistersinger. According to *The New York Times* correspondent Frederick T. Birchall, the enthusiastic crowd cheered for the triumphant Führer as he entered the stadium.⁴⁹

The Nuremberg Rallies

From 1933 through the planned-but-cancelled event in 1939, the gatherings at Nuremberg were the most ostentatious show of Nazi might. While there had been smaller events beginning in 1923, it was in 1933 that the Nazi machinery began in earnest. An estimated 500,000 gathered to celebrate the Third Reich, or, at very least, they gathered to partake in the mythmaking of the Third Reich. A fundamental element in this myth was *Die Meistersinger*, which the Nazis used to validate the authenticity and legitimacy of their party. This idea of authenticity was essential to the Nazi myth. The very city of Nuremberg was chosen because it was, as a writer for the *New York Herald Tribune* called it, “the most German of all German cities.”⁵⁰ Paired with “the most German of operas,” a powerful symbol is born. In *Die Meistersinger*, Hitler found his proof of authenticity—his regime’s validation. Thus *Die Meistersinger* wound its way throughout every rally. Virtually every rally featured a gala (as well as uncut) production of *Die Meistersinger*, and selections from the work could be found at various events during the course of the rally. In 1933 the “Rally of Victory” was inaugurated by a “fanfare of trumpets introducing the opening bars of the processional [Act III, Scene 5] from ‘Die Meistersinger’ to herald the arrival of Hitler.”⁵¹ At the inaugural ceremony in the great hall, with Winifred Wagner in attendance, a chorus of children sang the “Wach’

⁴⁹ Frederick T. Birchall, “100,000 Hail Hitler,” *New York Times*, 2 August 1936, 1. Also reported was the fact that the U.S. athletes refused to salute him during their entrance.

⁵⁰ “Envoys Snub Hitler’s Party at Nuremberg,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 31 August 1933, 8.

⁵¹ Frederick T. Birchall, “Nazi Legions Mass at Greatest Rally,” *New York Times*, 31 August 1933, 1.

Auf" from Act III of the opera, while the second day opened with a municipal orchestra performing the *Vorspiel*.⁵²

Across the board, the press coverage was the same. Much was said about the association of city and opera, and the press seemed eager to discuss the various uses of the opera.⁵³

The 1934 "Rally of Unity and Strength" featured the annual gala performance of *Die Meistersinger* as well as the requisite parades of an estimated 600,000 soldiers.⁵⁴

John Elliot of the *New York Herald Tribune* referred to Nuremberg as "the city of Hans Sachs," with banners of swastikas flying "as well as with the old banners that the Meistersingers once flaunted [. . .]"⁵⁵ On the seventh day of the rally, Hitler made a speech (as quoted and translated by John Elliot) stating, "So long as the National Socialist state exists, there will be the National Socialist Party, and so long as the National Socialist Party exists, there will only be The National Socialist State."⁵⁶

Clearly, the language used here reflects that used in the final Hans Sachs speech. Ralph Barnes of The *New York Herald Tribune* ominously reported that, "Even the house of

⁵² Birchall, "Nazi Legions Mass at Greatest Rally," 1.

⁵³ "Envoys Snub Hitler's Party at Nuremberg," *New York Herald Tribune*, 31 August 1933, 8. "Hitler Insists Jewry Must be Uprooted," *New York Herald Tribune*, 2 September 1933, 1; "Hitler Opens Nazi Conclave at Nuremberg," *New York Daily News*, 31 August 1933, 16; "300,000 Idolize Hitler in 2 Nazi Mass Tributes," *New York Herald Tribune* 3 September 1933, 8; "Hitler Saluted Nazi Legions' War Machine," *New York Herald Tribune*, 4 September 1933, 1.

⁵⁴ John Elliot, "Hitler Opens Assembly of 600,000 Nazis," *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 September 1934, 1; Elliot, "German Army Salutes Hitler at Maneuvers," *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 September 1934, 5; "Big Nazi Conclave Will Start Today," *New York Times*, 10 September 1935, 11; "Hitler is Elated by Wide Acclaim," *New York Times* 11 September 1934, 13.

⁵⁵ Elliot, "Hitler Opens Assembly of 600,000 Nazis," *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 September 1934, 1.

⁵⁶ Elliot, "German Army Salutes Hitler At Maneuvers," *New York Herald Tribune*, September 11, 1934, 5.

Hans Sachs, shoemaker-meistersinger, displayed swastikas.”⁵⁷

Thus was the tone set for the subsequent rallies. Without fail, each journalist mentioned Nuremberg within the context of its storied past and effectively tied that past to its present within the Third Reich using *Die Meistersinger* as a point of reference. *The New York Times* stated in 1938, “Nuremberg now symbolizes the power and prestige of the new and greater German Reich,”⁵⁸ while about the opera itself, Frederick T. Birchall wrote in 1937, “The opera is given unabridged—five hours of it—and this is perhaps as notable a presentation of it as is made anywhere in the world, not even excepting Baireuth [. . .]”⁵⁹ At that same rally, Birchall continued:

Black-clad Elite Guards lined streets for this drive and for his subsequent progress to the Rathaus for the official reception and later to the opera for a Festival presentation of “Die Meistersinger” [. . .] This is a feature of the congresses. It is given without cuts—five and one-half hours of it—so it is a serious undertaking both for singers and audience [. . .] The performance was no less excellent than usual. It had been rehearsed for months. The informed audience was no less reliant.⁶⁰

Ralph Barnes of the *New York Herald Tribune* said of that same rally, “[. . .] Chancellor Adolf Hitler [was] at the opera here last night as he listened to a five-and-a-half-hour performance of ‘Die Meistersinger,’ by Wagner, his favorite composer. Der Fuehrer has heard this opera more than 250 times.”⁶¹ Another writer for the *New York Herald Tribune* astutely observed,

All the Nazi demonstrations were accompanied by a distinctly religious or at least mystical flavor, and many foreign visitors agreed that no one can understand the Third

⁵⁷ Ralph W. Barnes, “Anti-Semitism Set as Theme of Nazi Congress,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 September 1935, 9.

⁵⁸ Birchall, “Nazi Victory in Austria Stressed as Nuremberg Congress Opens,” 6 September 1938, 1.

⁵⁹ Birchall, “Hitler Gives Fillip to Nuremberg Fete,” *New York Times*, 7 September 1937, 1.

⁶⁰ Birchall, “Nazi Victory in Austria,” 1.

⁶¹ Barnes, “Nazi Rally at Nuremberg Awaits Next Hitler Step,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 6 September 1938, 1.

Reich unless he senses the reverent attitude which Hitler's disciples have concerning their master and teacher.⁶²

This last statement gets to the heart of the religious tenor that Hitler employed to establish and maintain his myth, and he utilized *Die Meistersinger* to this end. At the last rally, in a symbolic "rebirth" of Germany:

[B]efore the official opening of the Nazi party congress, a symbolic act of great significance was performed in the six-century old church of St. Catherine, commonly known as the Church of the Meistersinger, because scenes of Wagner's opera of that name are laid there.⁶³

The "symbolic act" was to deposit into this church the crown of the Holy Roman Emperors as well as the scepter, orb, and sword of Charlemagne. Thus in one significant act, Hitler placed his Germany on the same continuum that began with Charlemagne, using *Die Meistersinger* as the symbolic vessel.

Reactions in the Press

Most of the previous discussion focuses on the reports, mainly in the New York press, of Hitler's use of *Die Meistersinger* as a propaganda tool of the Third Reich. And most of these reports present the information with little editorializing. But what were the reactions (if any) to the "Nazi-fication" of Wagner and *Die Meistersinger*?

During the World War I there had been outraged public cries against German opera, with audiences more than willing to equate Wagner with the Kaiser. However, the tone was slightly different in the years prior to World War II. This may, in part, reflect the fact that events leading up to the two conflicts followed a different timetable: the

⁶² "Nazi Building New Religion Around Hitler," *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 September 1935, 23.

⁶³ Barnes, "Henlein at Nazi Congress with Czech 'Last Offer'," *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 September 1939, 1.

beginning of World War I was somewhat sudden, while the start of World War II developed more gradually. As early as 1934, the appropriation had been visible enough that a *New York Times* writer felt compelled to state:

The need for affirmation of faith in genius like Wagner's has never been greater, and it is important that it come from countries other than that which produced him and his tremendous predecessors. For Wagner's music belongs not only to "gleichgeschaltet" Germany but to all humanity. With Nazi propagandists clamoring that the music dramas express only the ineluctable Aryan tradition, that "Parsifal" is only for Baireuth and that 'Meistersinger' glorifies merely the so-called Germanic race, it is imperative for Americans to flock to Wagner's music and to value it for whatever is ennobling and generous and veracious.⁶⁴

It is telling that the writer is calling for Americans to embrace the opera despite the now apparent associations. It is also telling that this association was considered newsworthy enough that Hitler's attendance at *Die Meistersinger* was heavily covered. *The New York Times* commented, "Tonight Hitler leaned back in his spacious loge at the opera and enjoyed his favorite music—'Die Meistersinger'." ⁶⁵

By the end of the decade, when the association of *Die Meistersinger* and the Third Reich was simply too powerful to ignore, there were still calls to remain neutral. Reporting on the first International Congress of the American Musicological Society, Howard Taubman of *The New York Times* quoted an open letter written by Roman Rolland. In it, Rolland stated:

In the field of art, there is not—there should not be—any rivalry among nations. The only combat worthy of us is that which is waged, in every country and at every hour, between culture and ignorance, between light and chaos. Let us save all the light that can be saved! There is none more refulgent than music. It is the sun of the inner universe

⁶⁴ Howard Taubman, "'Tannhauser' Sung as First of Cycle," *New York Times*, 10 February 1934, 13.

⁶⁵ "Hitler Stresses that He Restored Full Arms Sovereignty to Reich," *New York Times*, 9 September 1936, 1. Another statement simply mentioned that he attended the opera while in Hamburg. "Hitler Attends Hamburg Opera," *New York Times*, 24 June 1935, 7.

[. . .] The effect of war on musical life, as long as we remain neutral, is not likely to be marked.⁶⁶

This is a plea for art before politics. There is a sense that these calls are pre-emptive. It is almost as if the journalists were trying to stem an anticipated tide of anti-Wagner sentiment. The final word of this decade came from Olin Downes in October of 1939, the final season of *Die Meistersinger* before it was banned. In an article entitled “Wagner and the New War,” Downes praises Metropolitan General Manager Edward Johnson for his “balanced and sane attitude toward opera and the other arts,” and credits him with upholding the music culture of the world. Downes then furthers this idea by stating, “Nor is it easy to believe that if ever we enter the conflict it will be necessary to take Wagner off the lists.” What Downes did (and could) not know was that Johnson had already made the decision to withdraw *Die Meistersinger* once the current season was finished. Despite this, Downes ends with, “This time the passions of war, the rivalries and chicaneries of government will not be permitted to take [*Die Meistersinger*] from us.”⁶⁷

Perceptions from and Impacts upon the Met

As New York audiences were kept abreast of events surrounding *Die Meistersinger* by the New York media, the Metropolitan Opera held a keen view of the appropriation. Much as his predecessors had done, Edward Johnson made an annual pilgrimage to Europe every summer to scout and audition new (and possibly cheaper) talent. It was during these trips that he directly encountered the Nazi’s appropriation of *Die Meistersinger*. It is through the minutes of the meetings of the Metropolitan Board as

⁶⁶ Taubman, “Effects of War,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1939, 139.

⁶⁷ Olin Downes, “Wagner and the New War,” *New York Times*, 15 October 1939, 145.

well as the correspondence between the main players that we can ascertain the Metropolitan's reaction and understand its planned course of action.

During these trips, Johnson corresponded extensively with Assistant General Manager Edward Ziegler (whom he called Neddie). Much of the correspondence refers to performances and performers. Though Johnson's criticism was often brutal, and his tone somewhat catty, this correspondence provides a wonderful insight into the selection process of the performers.⁶⁸ The correspondence also shows the growing complications of doing business with fascist Germany. In 1937 Johnson cabled Bayreuth's Artistic Director Heinz Tietjen (1881-1967) with the hope of setting up a meeting with him. In the cable to Tietjen, Johnson obsequiously states,

Will you therefore pardon this unceremonious and unconventional manner of presenting myself, and give me the pleasure of meeting you, and the opportunity of knowing something of the wonderful things you are accomplishing and of which we hear so much in America.⁶⁹

By 1937 Tietjen's now legendary Bayreuth production of *Die Meistersinger* was five years old. Further, Hitler's fondness for both Tietjen and his production were well known. What could Johnson possibly have needed from Tietjen at this point? Or could it simply be that Johnson was attempting to secure the most artistic of producers. Whatever the reason, there was never a reply, nor was there a meeting between the two.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Of tenor Max Lorenz Johnson stated, "Tenor Max Lorenz – looked and acted splendidly agile – voice too lyric – lower register senza appoggio – last act very weak." Cable from Edward Johnson to Edward Ziegler, 12 May 1937, Edward Johnson Collection, 1937 Folder, Guelph University Archive, Guelph University Library.

⁶⁹ Cable from Edward Johnson to Heinz Tietjen, 19 June 1937, Edward Johnson Collection, 1937 Folder, University of Guelph Archive, University of Guelph Library.

⁷⁰ In a cable of 25 June 1937 to Ziegler, Johnson remarks upon the fact that Tietjen did not answer. Cable between Edward Johnson and Edward Ziegler, 25 June 1937, Edward Johnson Collection, 1937 Folder, University of Guelph Archive, University of Guelph Library.

As the decade progressed, the information coming from Germany regarding *Die Meistersinger* became increasingly frequent, more unambiguous, and difficult to ignore. There began a tension between Johnson's need for art and his need to be pragmatic, much the same as Otto Kahn had experienced twenty years earlier. Yet in 1937 Johnson could still respond to such pressure with: "Look at the great works of Wagner. They are our most popular production. Most people find these works rewarding and exciting nowadays."⁷¹ It is in 1938 where things came to a head. In the lead up to the beginning of the conflict, the Met staged benefits to aid the affected regions. One of the many benefit performances was a production of *Die Walküre* to aid the German American Relief Organizations, with tickets available at the office of German shipping company Hapag-Lloyd. Though this benefit was played down in the press,⁷² Johnson received numerous enraged telegrams urging him to cancel the performance. One telegram, from the well-known author and music critic George Richard Marek stated:

Shocked to see Metropolitan permit benefit with Hapag Address. After opinions expressed by leading minds can you still excuse an American Institution helping or doing business with Nazi organization? Please advise whether you are going to cancel this benefit.⁷³

In an unsigned letter from the Staats-Herald Corp, the writer offhandedly mentions the difficulties of any benefit involving the German-American Charities.⁷⁴ In yet another letter, Israel Slater questioned the appropriateness of the Hapag-Lloyd

⁷¹ Taubman, "Opera Takes on Modern Aspects," *New York Times Magazine*, 11 November 1937, 10.

⁷² Indeed, there was only one *New York Times* announcement. "Display Ad 201," *New York Times*, 13 November 1938, 182.

⁷³ Telegram from George Richard Marek to Edward Johnson 22 November 1938, Edward Johnson Collection, 1938 Folder, University of Guelph Archive, University of Guelph Library.

⁷⁴ Letter from Staats-Herald Corp to Edward Johnson, 24 November 1938, Edward Johnson Collection, 1938 Folder, University of Guelph Archive, University of Guelph Library.

association as the company was thought to be an extension of the German government.⁷⁵

Johnson responded by assuring the concerned parties that none of the money raised would find its way to Germany. The situation is indicative of the fact that sensitivities were running high and that Johnson felt compelled to distance his organization from anything that may have been associated with the Third Reich. Similarly, Johnson began to consider the idea of pulling *Die Meistersinger*. On the one hand, Johnson obviously feared ramifications from any association with the German government; on the other, he was reluctant to alter his repertoire.

Yet the pressure on him to do just that had mounted, and he decided that the 1939/1940 season would be the final one for *Die Meistersinger*. Despite this, there was no official announcement, and the Met pushed subscriptions for that season with *Die Meistersinger* as a potent selling point. A critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* even praised Johnson's decision to maintain the work in the course of a review of the previous season's *Meistersinger*:

Mr. Schorr was in good voice and the insight, understanding, mellow humor and pathos of an impersonation which has long been a classic example here of the work of a great singing actor was one of the major reasons for gratitude that the Metropolitan did not shelve 'Die Meistersinger' this season—which had been rumored as a possibility—and for regret that this was the only performance of this inexhaustible work.⁷⁶

Thus there had already been rumors circulating that *Die Meistersinger* may be put on hiatus at some point.

By late 1939, the conflict was manifest in the inner workings of the Board. During the General Meeting of the Board in both September and October, Johnson was

⁷⁵ Letter from Israel Slater to Edward Johnson, 15 November 1938, Edward Johnson Collection, 1938 Folder, University of Guelph Archive, University of Guelph Library.

⁷⁶ "Metropolitan's '39-'40 Season to be 16 Weeks," *New York Herald Tribune*, 28 February 1939, 13.

pressed to discuss the disposition of *Die Meistersinger*. The minutes of 2 October 1939 stated, “Whereupon Mr. Johnson set forth to the Board his plans, and stressed the difficulty of securing all of the artists contracted for due to the war conditions abroad.”⁷⁷ Johnson was beginning to feel pressure from organizations outside the Met and, indeed, outside of New York.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors, 18 September 1939 and 2 October 1939. Metropolitan Opera Archives.

CHAPTER 4

TWO SENTIMENTS: ANTI-GERMAN, ANTI-SEMITITE

*In the works of Wagner the German people pay
devotion to art at its highest,
whose mission it is to raise men above
hates and fears and cruelties and mean motives
and party passions into an atmosphere of universal
sympathy and universal understanding.¹*

*True the performances mingle closely with
the Jewish High Holy Days, and 'Meistersinger' is curious
fare for the occasion, with its blatant German Nationalism,
latent anti-Semitism and close identification
with the Third Reich.²*

As discussed in Chapter 3, by the end of the 1930s *Die Meistersinger* had become too large a liability for the Met to continue to perform. During this decade, the work had become the *de facto* “national opera” of Nazi Germany, and New York audiences (as well as audiences across the country) were well aware of this fact thanks to the extensive coverage by the New York press and reports from Germany. Ultimately, despite having been a devotee of the opera, Edward Johnson, general manager of the Met, had to pull the opera after the 1939-40 season. Simply put, *Die Meistersinger* was not worth the trouble.

World War II was a crossroad in the reception of *Die Meistersinger*. The largest problem facing *Die Meistersinger* was the growing anti-German sentiment in this country and in New York. This was in response to the German aggression in Europe and also to the bands of pro-German sympathizers in this country. To this was added the discomfort among some Americans and New Yorkers toward the racial and ethnic policies of the

¹ “Topics of The Times,” *New York Times*, 23 July 1933, E4.

² James R. Oestreich, “2-Day ‘Meistersinger’ by Chicago Symphony,” *New York Times*, 26 September 1995, C11.

Nazis, particularly their treatment of the Jews. The German nationalism in the work crashed head-on into a strong anti-German sentiment. To many New Yorkers, the knowledge of the opera's esteemed place within the Third Reich collided with the perceived nationalism within the opera.

Bearing this in mind, it is most important to understand that it was the overwhelming anti-German sentiment that caused the Met to pull the opera in 1940. Despite there being a faction of the population that was disturbed by the atrocities of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, it was not the anti-Semitism, nor that of Wagner, nor even the anti-Semitism perceived within *Die Meistersinger* that caused the discomfort with this work. It was only after the war, when the brutalities of the Holocaust were becoming more fully understood, that anti-Semitism began to be an issue. For the most part, the anti-Semitism of New Yorkers (particularly the anti-Semitism of the of the Met Board) rendered any perceived anti-Semitism within the opera non-problematic.³

This chapter will further flesh out the issues discussed above. Namely the “German Question”: the dialectic between the rise of pro-German sympathy in the United States, both overt and covert (the latter taking the form of Patriotic Societies preaching a policy of non-interventionism) and the anti-German backlash, which played itself out everywhere from a localized New York City level to the halls of Congress, including a musical “Germanophobia.” Then follows a discussion of the anti-Semitism, again both open and more nuanced, and the various responses to it, and finally, the question of the intersection of politics—however ugly—and art. This begs the ultimate

³ For studies of anti-Semitism in America see: Lee J. Levinger, PhD, “Anti-Semitism in the United States: Its History and Causes (Westport, CT: Greenword Press, 1972); and also Harold E. Quinley and Charles Y. Glock, *Notes on Anti-Semitism in America* (New Brunswick: Macmillian, 1983).

questions: should *Die Meistersinger* be held hostage to associations with the Nazis and is Wagner guilty of what Hitler made of him?

THE GERMAN QUESTION

The anti-German sentiment that had so marked World War I held great sway over the Met at the time. The situation was slightly different before World War II. Having just recovered from the especially virulent round of anti-German sentiment just two decades earlier, the paranoia was slightly more subdued or at least more nuanced. Gone were the crazed calls to rename sauerkraut “liberty salad” and German measles “Freedom’s Rash.” However, as news of the Nazis’ gains crossed the Atlantic, it seemed as if a tipping point was soon coming. The sentiment of the mid-to-late 1930s was summed up perfectly by a *New York Times* article discussing similar sentiments in the United Kingdom. In 1935 Frederick T. Birchall wrote:

But popular opinion in Britain is certainly all one way. It imbibed dislike and distrust of Germany in wartime and was only beginning to get over it when the Nazi methods started up the old feeling afresh. The news of German re-armament is rapidly restoring all the old views in full force.⁴

This would very soon mirror the sentiment on this side of the Atlantic. The issue of a re-emergent Germany was a thorny one. While there were some who were zealous about a New Germany and worked tirelessly to that end, there were many who were not.

Pro-German Sympathizers

Much of the anti-German sentiment was generated by the early formation of German societies. These societies, albeit small in number, fomented discord between

⁴ Frederick T. Birchall, “Anti-German Feeling Mounting in Britain,” *New York Times*, 12 May 1935, E4.

German-Americans and other groups, as for many New Yorkers and Americans in general they came to represent all Germans, Nazi sympathizers included.

The Bund

As early as 1934, signs of malcontent were present. As reported in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the town of Freeport (a suburb of New York City in Nassau County) refused to issue a parade permit to the Friends of the New Germany, as they were said to “stand for everything un-American.”⁵ The German-American Bund, the later incarnation of the Friends of the New Germany, caused still greater tension between Germans and Americans, and also fueled a wave of anti-Semitism. In one vituperative letter in *The New York Times*, the writer stated that the feud against National Socialist Germany as seen in the United States was caused by international Jewry and that the “Ickes, Pittmans, Baruchs, LaGuardias, Untermeyers and others” were responsible for relations between the two countries having reached the “zero point.”⁶ As reported in *The New York Times*, Germany was said to condemn the United States as bowing to Jewish pressures as opposed to mending German/American relations.⁷ Soon thereafter, the trend was to associate “ordinary” Germans with the German-American Bund and all Germans with National Socialists. In one letter attesting to this, the writer stated that German-

⁵ “Freeport Bans Parade,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 August 1934, 7. The Friends of the New Germany was formed in 1933 by German Nazi party member Heinz Spanknöbel at the behest of Rudolf Hess. Though its membership never reached more than 10,000 (consisting mainly of German Nationals), it was a vocal group, working to foment Nazi sympathies in the United States. Eventually, the United States Congress formed the Special Committee on Un-American Activities Authorized to Investigate Nazi Propaganda and Other Propaganda Activities. The Friends of the New Germany was dissolved in 1936 and was soon replaced by the German-American Bund.

⁶ “Germans Regaled by Attacks on U.S.,” *New York Times* 25 December 1938, 44.

⁷ Guido Enderis, “Germany Condemns Failure of U.S. To Disavow Ickes for His Speech” *New York Times*, 31 December 1938, 1. “New German Group Outlines Policy Here: Successor to Friends of the New Germany to Take an Interest in Politics,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1936, 7.

Americans had become a “stench in the nostrils of real American citizens.”⁸

The German-American Bund gathered steam during the late 1930s.⁹ Rallies both for and against Hitler were sprouting throughout the city, the largest being the Bund rally at Madison Square Garden in August of 1936. The rally was estimated to have drawn 22,000 to its cause. While the scene inside the rally was relatively calm, there was an estimated 1,700 police needed outside the venue to contain anti-Hitler counter protests, many of which were hosted by the German-American League, an avowedly anti-Nazi organization.¹⁰ The Bund resorted to dirty tactics to achieve their end. Reports were beginning to surface that the Bund had created difficulties for ordinary German-Americans by threatening them or family members still living in Germany. The founder, Fritz Kuhn, was eventually called before the Special House Committee Investigating Un-American Activities chaired by Martin Dies, Jr. The meeting became increasingly contentious, and Kuhn admitted that the Bund had been largely anti-Semitic.¹¹ The Bund also openly attacked government officials. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes was regularly accused of serving “Jewish interests but ignoring German-American relations,” and that the United States Government was under “Jewish pressure.”¹² At another hearing held by Dies, one Bund member called President Roosevelt “an insane Jew.”¹³

⁸ “Urges Deporting Bund,” *New York Times*, 25 August 1939, 10.

⁹ One of the Bund’s recruitment methods was its various “camps” throughout the East, all named after historic or mythic Germans. Most prominent of these was Camp Siegfried in Yaphank, Long Island. Named after Wagner’s perfect hero, this camp operated with the sole purpose of creating a force of young and fervent Nazis. “15,000 Attend Fete of German Groups,” *New York Times*, 31 August 1936, 3.

¹⁰ “Anti-Nazi Program Marks German Day,” *New York Times* 4 December 1939, 8.

¹¹ Frederick R. Barkley, “Kuhn Near Blows at Dies Hearing,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1939, 4.

¹² Guido Enderis, “Germany Condemns Failure of U. S. to Disavow Ickes for his Speech,” 1.

¹³ “Ickes is Attacked at Dies’s Hearing,” *New York Times*, 6 November 1938, 5.

America First: Non-Interventionists

That the Bund was a radical organization bent on fueling trouble goes without saying. But as was the case during World War I, American patriotic societies were founded to deal with the coming war. The most influential of these was the America First Committee. Whereas the German-American Bund was determined to create conflict, the America First Committee was determined to avoid it. With a non-interventionist philosophy, it was formed in 1940 at Yale Law School by future President Gerald Ford, Sargent Shriver, the future Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, among others. Most members tended to come from WASP-ish high society and brought into the organization the prejudices of that quarter. Though headquartered in Chicago, the Committee had a large presence in New York City and included a number of members of the Metropolitan Opera Board. America First was extremely vocal and influential. Indeed, the group came to be viewed by many liberals as aiding the Nazis. It was perceived as being anti-Semitic. Indeed, in one public forum, two of its members, Senators Gerald P. Nye and Burton K. Wheeler were accused of anti-Semitism by failed Republican Presidential candidate Wendell Willkie. In a war of words that eventually led to a rally at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Nye vehemently denied that any among his group was anti-Semitic and further charged that Willkie was provoking conflict to cloud the issue of the United States entrance into the war.¹⁴ Moreover, America First had chosen famed aviator Charles Lindbergh as its spokesperson. Lindbergh was very outspoken in favor of eugenics and in 1939 wrote an article for *Reader's Digest* in which he espoused a philosophy of Western European racial supremacy: "[T]hose priceless

¹⁴ "Nye Sees 'Smear' Against War Foes," *New York Times*, 23 September 1941, 6.

possessions which permit the White race to live at all in a pressing sea of Yellow, Black, and Brown.”¹⁵ He spoke at a Des Moines conference in 1941 stating that “The three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish, and the Roosevelt Administration.” Of the Jews, he further stated: “Their greatest danger lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion picture [industry], our press, our radio, and our government.”¹⁶ Thus while America First was preaching a policy of isolationism, many of its members were simultaneously holding the Jews responsible for the conflict while denouncing their treatment at the hand of the Nazis.¹⁷

Anti-German Backlash

Certainly by the late 1930s, ordinary German-Americans now found themselves suddenly suspect. Many were forced to choose between being German or American. German businesses were forced to close, and there was a sharp decline in German studies at New York City high schools and colleges.¹⁸ It was at best a messy situation, and Germans were barely tolerated even if their American loyalties were beyond reproach.

Official Backlash

The backlash manifested itself in an official capacity in rallies and opinion polls. As news of the Nazi aggressions reached New York, official protests began in denunciation of Hitler. One such early protest was a mass rally at Madison Square

¹⁵ Charles Lindbergh, “Aviation, Geography, and Race,” *Reader’s Digest* 35 (November 1939): 65.

¹⁶ Charles Lindbergh, “Des Moines Speech” delivered on September 11, 1941 in Des Moines, Iowa. “Lindbergh Sees a ‘Plot’ for War,” *New York Times*, 12 September 1941, 2.

¹⁷ The House Committee Investigating Un-American Activities, headed by Chairman Martin Dies Jr., officially listed America First as an anti-Semitic organization. “Anti-Jewish ‘Tide’ Linked to ‘Rackets’,” *New York Times*, 20 November 1938, 33.

¹⁸ “German Study Cut 35% in Five Years,” *New York Times* 17 May 1939, 17.

Garden hosted by the CIO and the American Jewish Labor Congress. Though more pro-Union than anti-Nazi, with CIO president John L. Lewis stating that Hitler had “crushed” labor, it featured speakers ranging from Mayor La Guardia to Erika Mann, daughter of Thomas Mann.¹⁹ By 1939 there had been a measurable increase of anti-German sentiment: a Gallup Poll showed that 65% of those polled were anti-German and intended to boycott all things Nazi.²⁰ During that same year, there had also been a study reported in *The New York Times* that showed that the study of German had declined to its lowest point since World War I.²¹ Yet despite all the signs pointing towards a coming jingoist trend, there was still an atmosphere of reluctance to enter into another European conflict. Harold B. Hinton of *The New York Times* commented on this when he wrote:

There are substantial differences between present conditions in the country and those which prevailed before the United States entered the World War. There is, for one thing, a more general realization of the horror and futility of war now than there was then, because every community has men of early middle age who served in the last one and can testify to that effect.²²

Popular Backlash

One of the best gauges for popular sentiment can be found in Letters to the Editor of the various newspapers. One of the more interesting aspects is that great pains were taken to differentiate between “Germans” and “Nazis.” There seemed to be two schools of thought: the first was negativity toward all Germans (the pan-German approach), the second toward the Nazis only. Those subscribing to the latter were vehement in their dislike for the Third Reich and quick to put distance between it and ordinary Germans.

¹⁹ “Labor Democracy is Bar to Fascism,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1937, 1.

²⁰ Find Gallup Poll Citation. “U.S. Voters Favor Boycott of Nazis,” *New York Times*, 12 April 1939, 5T.

²¹ “German Study Cut 35% in Five Years,” 17.

²² Harold B. Hinton, “Can The United States Stay Out if War Comes?” *New York Times*, 16 April 1939, E3.

In one such letter from 1938, a frequent contributor, Erwin H. Klaus, stated, “While a good percentage of German-Americans perhaps think of Hitler as having done right by Germany, they are far from being willing to lend any effort, hand, or money to perpetuation of Nazi ideas here.”²³ In another letter: Klaus estimated that sixty to ninety percent of Germans did not support the Third Reich and were not “lovers of force and war and joyous followers of an evangel of hate.”²⁴ In a similarly themed letter, Otto Sattler, President for the German-American League for Culture wrote:

All true German-Americans who swore allegiance to the United States stand out aghast and ashamed at the new outrages of organized mob violence throughout the Third Reich [. . .] It is generally believed here that the majority of German-Americans favor Nazism. This is not true. And it is not true that the majority of German people approve [of] the horrible and cowardly treatment of weak and defenseless Jews.²⁵

This last statement is interesting in that it simultaneously disparages both the Third Reich and the Reich’s treatment of the Jews. By referring to the Jews as “weak and defenseless,” Sattler was dancing around, if not outrightly playing into, the prevalent anti-Semitism. As we will see below, while there was outrage regarding the treatment of the Jews in Germany, there were many in New York who still harbored feelings of ambivalence toward the Jews.

An anti-German and a specifically strong anti-Nazi rhetoric reached a fever pitch in 1940 with the release of the successful comic movie *You Nazty Spy!* featuring the Three Stooges. This was followed in 1941 by Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, in which Wagner’s music played a major role: the overture to *Lohengrin* accompanies the

²³ Erwin H. Klaus, “Not all Germans pro-Nazi,” Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 9 May 1938, 16.

²⁴ Erwin H. Klaus, “Letter to The Editor,” *New York Times*, 28 September 1939, 24.

²⁵ Otto Sattler, “Comment on the Current Situation in Germany,” Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 17 November 1938, 24.

scene where Charlie Chaplin, dressed like Adolf Hitler (or a Hitler-esque character), danced with an inflatable globe.²⁶

Musical Germanophobia

Much like the general anti-German sentiment, the musical Germanophobia was extant, yet nuanced. For example, in 1939 there was a poll conducted to see whether or not German music should be performed in the United States by American ensembles. *The New York Times* bemoaned this poll, stating: “Should we boycott Wagner because he became the demigod of the Nazis, and concentrate, as a sort of counter-action, on Mendelssohn because the Hitlerites declared his art un-German?”²⁷ During World War I, there had been protests and riots surrounding performances of *Die Meistersinger*, whereas in the run-up to World War II the sentiment was comparatively tame, if not humorous. In one show of rebellion against Wagner, a local professor altered the text of the finale of *Die Meistersinger* so that his glee club would not have to sing, “Honor your German masters,” but rather “Honor your master singers.”²⁸ In an impassioned Letter to the Editor, a writer makes a wonderfully Germanophobic reference to *Die Meistersinger* when he states that “real Americans have no desire to see the clenched, upraised fist and *heil* Hitler comic opera in this country.”²⁹

What is ironic about this statement was that Americans and New Yorkers in particular wanted to see the comic opera. But it is especially telling that, thanks to the

²⁶ About Chaplin’s use of Wagner, Lutz P. Koepnick asked: “How can Wagner at once help emphasize a progressive vision of human individualism and a fascist preview of absolute domination? How can the master’s music simultaneously signify a desire for lost emotional integrity and for authoritative grandeur?” *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema Between Hitler And Hollywood* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002) 141.

²⁷ H.C.K., “Letter to The Editor,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1939, 14.

²⁸ “Alters Opera Praising Germans,” *New York Times*, 17 January 1939, 27.

²⁹ “Urges Deporting Bund,” *New York Times*, 25 August 1939, 10.

local (and at times national) press, New York audiences were well aware of the fact that *Meistersinger* had become the “*heil* Hitler comic opera.”

Ultimately the Bund and groups of the same ilk (including America First) were discredited or forced to disband, but the damage was done. These groups helped perpetuate two distinctly different, repugnant sentiments that served their specific ends. The first was to foster anti-German sentiment between the German-Americans and other groups. The second was to bring to the surface a latent sense of anti-Semitism. Bearing this in mind, let us briefly examine the state of anti-Semitism in the lead-up to World War II.

ANTI-SEMITISM

With constant calls about “Jewish pressure” and “Jewish interests,” it was not long before the half-buried anti-Semitism became increasingly overt. There was a paradox. On the one hand, there was a sense of outrage at the atrocities occurring in Europe; yet on the other, these feelings melted into ambivalence when confronted with local Jews. In other words, the Jews in Europe were suffering terribly, but that did not necessitate any immediate action on the part of average New Yorkers. There were two distinct levels of anti-Semitism during this time. The first was overt anti-Semitism, the virulent hatred spewed forth by certain members of the Bund (and America First as well) serving as a good example. This second was a more nuanced, ambivalent anti-Semitism, a sense of vague empathy, juxtaposed with faint resentment.

Overt

While New York was aghast at the atrocities, anti-Semitism was prevalent enough

that it manifested as a growing resentment towards the Jews and their plight. Of the anti-Semitism during the first half of the twentieth century there was a shifting philosophy owing to persistent stereotypes. Much of this hatred was carried over from the late nineteenth century immigration of Eastern European Jews (as discussed in Chapter 2). This vitriol was propelled into the twentieth century onward owing to, among others, D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, the circulation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the anti-Semitic campaigns of Henry Ford in his publication, *The Dearborn Independent*,³⁰ and a general post-World War I xenophobia. That this carried over into the 1930s and 40s should not have come as any surprise.³¹ While overt anti-Semitism was largely condemned, it was the covert anti-Semitism that proved far more insidious.

Nuanced: Societal and New Immigration Laws

That New York harbored a deep-seated, if covert, anti-Semitism is unquestionable. In a Gallup Poll of 22 November 1938, (taken just two weeks after the violence of *Kristallnacht*), out of 3,121 people interviewed, only 5.6% of those polled approved of Nazi treatment of Jews; yet only 21.2% of 3,086 interviewees polled believed that the United States should allow more to emigrate.³² Further, there had been decisive steps taken to limit the number of Jews allowed into the United States. When the Immigration Act of 1917 (with its quotas, literacy test, and steep tax) failed to stem the tide, the National Origins Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act) was passed. This act

³⁰ At one point, this Dearborn Michigan-based newspaper had a circulation second only to the *New York Daily News*. It was owned wholly by Henry Ford who used it much in the same way the Wagner family used the *Bayreuther Blätter*, as little more than a forum for personal worldviews. He was forced to fold it in 1927 amid numerous law suits.

³¹ See Michael N. Dobkowski, "American Anti-Semitism: A Reinterpretation," *American Quarterly* 29 (Summer, 1977): 180.

³² Gallup Poll #139, November 22, 1938, www.GallupBrain.com.

refigured the quotas, excluding entirely peoples from Asia (called the “Asiatic Barred Zone”) while heavily favoring those from Western Europe and making immigration from Eastern Europe nearly impossible.³³

An interesting development began to appear: it was not uncommon to advocate against anti-Semitism while simultaneously, and covertly, cultivating it. In one public example, American-born English socialite Lady Nancy Astor stated that she fully blamed the Jews for any over-zealous anti-German sentiment in America. She stated, “I am a pro-Jew and have always been a Zionist but anyone who reads the papers can see what is coming; it will react against them. And I tell all my Jewish friends the same thing.”³⁴ Thus while New Yorkers were aghast at the atrocities of the Third Reich, the anti-Semitism was prevalent enough that it manifested as a growing resentment toward the Jews and their plight. Further, the attitude articulated by Lady Astor was the norm, particularly among members of higher society (especially members of the Met’s Board.)

In the Met’s Boardroom

The Met had long had a love/hate relationship with German-Americans and German-Jews. The prejudices of the Board long reflected the general prejudices of society. This contentious relationship extended as far back as 1903, when Otto Kahn was

³³ One poignantly tragic example of this was the plight of the *St. Louis*, a Hamburg based steamship that in 1939 carried approximately 1,000 Jews from Hamburg to Cuba. The ship languished in the harbor of Havana while few of the 1,000 passengers were given entry. Unbeknownst to the travelers, the Cuban government had changed the required documents during the journey from Hamburg to limit to the growing number of Jewish exiles. The *St. Louis* then requested entry into the United States and Canada, but was denied by both. In the end, the ship returned to Europe with many of its passengers disembarking in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Unfortunately, these countries were soon invaded by Germany and it has been estimated that 254 of those passengers died during the Holocaust. “Unwanted Refugees,” *New York Times*, 4 June 1939, E1; Scott Miller, Sarah A. Ogilvie, *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

³⁴ “Lady Astor Warns of Anti-German Bias,” *New York Times*, 1 July 1937, 16.

brought onto the Met's Board as a member of the Conried Metropolitan Opera. It was not coincidental that the Metropolitan Real Estate Company (the so-called "Golden Horseshoe") was comprised mainly of WASP society, while the Metropolitan Opera Company's Board consisted largely of German and German-Jewish financiers. As such, there was a great deal of animosity between Kahn and the entrenched members of the Golden Horseshoe.³⁵ Through Kahn's investment bank, Kuhn, Loeb & Co., numerous other wealthy Jews sought membership on the Board. Not many were admitted. Even Kahn himself, a generous benefactor of the Met who would often cover Met losses out of his pocket and had renounced his own Judaism in favor of the Anglican Church, only gained entrée into the Golden Horseshoe boxes in 1924. Another notable Jew who sought membership in New York's most exclusive club was Felix Warburg, a Juilliard Board member and Wagner enthusiast who was said to have instructed Artur Bodanzky about proper tempos before performances. Despite his limitless patronage, he only achieved a coveted box in the Golden Horseshoe in the 1930s.³⁶ Indeed, within the WASP-ish enclave that was the Met's Board, the anti-Semitism was entrenched, traditional, and could be thought of as a microcosm of what existed in New York high

³⁵ Much of the ill will can be also traced to the professional animus between Kahn (as a representative of German-Jewish investment banking) and J. P. Morgan (as a representative of an American industrialist investment financier.) Their investment banks were in direct competition with one another, and both men extended that competition to include themselves. The history of the Met is filled with anecdotes of Morgan and Kahn continually at odds with one another and using repertoire as a weapon.

³⁶ Warburg was a partner at Kuhn, Loeb & Co. alongside Kahn. He was also a member of the Warburg banking family. As a prominent member of the American wing of this family, he keenly felt the conflict as there was still in Germany members of the family. Indeed, M. M. Warburg, the patriarch, initially provided funds for the Third Reich. See Ron Chernow, *The Warburgs, The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (New York: Random House, 1993).

society. Thus the sense of outrage aimed toward *Die Meistersinger* owing to its anti-Semitism did not materialize until after the War.

POLITICS AND ART

Absent during most of the press discourse during the 1930s and the initial appropriation of *Die Meistersinger* is an ideological discussion of its nationalism and anti-Semitism as it pertained to Hitler's own philosophies. It is one thing to marry an opera with a fascist regime, but it is another entirely to marry the ideologies of the composer of the opera with the leader of that fascist regime. Once we begin to place the principles of Adolf Hitler on the same continuum as those of Richard Wagner, the appropriation goes further than just the opera and extends itself into a marriage of those ideologies. In other words, did Hitler learn his philosophy from Richard Wagner and use *Die Meistersinger* in a far more sinister manner than just entertainment? While this concept remains contentious to this day, we begin to see a frank dialectic appear in 1940 beginning with an article written by Otto D. Tolischus:

The present war, almost unbeknown to both the Allies and the Germans themselves, is dominated by Richard Wagner – not the Richard Wagner of the incomparable, though still debated, melodies, but Richard Wagner who brought to life the dismal, pitiless and forgotten world of German antiquity, the world of fighting gods and fighting heroes, of dragons and demons, of destiny and pagan epics, which presents itself to other peoples as mere Wagnerian operas, but which has become subconscious reality to the German masses, and has been elevated to the inspirational mythos of the National Socialist movement that rules the Third Reich “[. . . T]he whole present war resolves itself into a super Wagnerian opera turned into grim reality.”³⁷

This passage unambiguously equates the ideologies of the Third Reich with those of Wagner. The response was swift and fierce. In an editorial the next day, the writer

³⁷ Otto D. Tolischus, “In the ‘Ring’ Operas May be Found,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1940, 97.

countered, “The greatest creative minds have experienced their worst betrayals at the hands of demagogues and fanatics willing to twist to their own desires and purposes the utterances of inspired leaders of mankind.” The editorial writer also reminded readers that Wagner would not have sided with Hitler: “More than any other writer or artist of his time in Germany, and in a period when it was dangerous to do so, did he inveigh publicly against the evils which he foresaw in the rising tide of industrialism in the modern state.”³⁸ In a Letter to the Editor entitled, “Wagner and Hitler: Composer’s Philosophy Regarded as Containing Nazi Element,” Seldon Rodman, the founder of the left-of-center political magazine *Common Sense*, made plain his feelings that Wagner was responsible for Hitler’s ills. Rodman unequivocally states: “But unfortunately, Wagner left, in addition, the philosophical blue-prints of the National Socialist State,” including a “fanatic anti-Semitism.” Rodman goes on to quote an article from an issue of *Common Sense* by Peter Viereck, who had apparently analyzed the similarities between Hitler and Wagner and whose work Thomas Mann had called, “[A]n extraordinarily sharp and inexorable analysis which will put an end to much sentimental innocence.” Commenting further in a separate article (and also quoted in Rodman’s Letter to the Editor) for *Common Sense*, Mann stated, “I go a little farther than Mr. Viereck. I find an element of Nazism not only in Wagner’s questionable literature; I find it also in his ‘music,’ in his work, similarly questionable, though in a loftier sense.”³⁹ To refute this, *The New York Times* published an anonymous Letter to the Editor praising the idea of Wagner’s

³⁸ “Wagner and Hitler,” *New York Times* 26 February 1940, 14.

³⁹ Seldon Rodman, “Wagner and Hitler: Composer’s Philosophy Regarded as Containing Nazi Element,” Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 3 March 1940, 75.

misappropriation by the Nazis or (as the writer stated) the “betrayal of Germania by Nazism’s Fafner and Fasolt, Hitler and Goering!”⁴⁰

One example of an impassioned plea for art above politics is a 1939 letter simply signed “German-American.” In it the writer expresses his wish that Americans and German-Americans would draw the line between culture and politics, also very *apropos* in terms of *Die Meistersinger*: “It appeals to the instinct of that small minority of Americans unable to draw the line between a cultural and political issue, unwilling to see that only the latter is at stake and unable to enjoy art for art’s sake and culture as it presents itself.”⁴¹ Thus, already by 1940, there existed a discourse weighing the ideologies of Wagner against those of Hitler and the Third Reich. Furthermore, there existed a discourse involving Hitler’s principles as a mere projection of Wagner’s.

While the frank dialectic of Wagner and his anti-Semitism only becomes a common part of Wagner discourse after World War II, a prototype had already made the rounds in the American musical press during the lead-up to World War I. Responding to a critique of Wagner (and his vegetarianism) in the *Harvard Musical Review* of 1914, Hiram Moderwell explained Wagner’s anti-Semitism as follows:

In the gradual struggle for German consolidation and national feeling the Jews have necessarily been a stumbling stone, being of another race and religion, and less able and willing to respond to the slogans of nationalization [. . .] And it is well to consider how much sound truth there is in Wagner’s attack on the Jews.⁴²

When considering this passage alongside Seldon Rodman’s words about Wagner’s providing, in his music, a blue-print for National Socialism and for a fanatical

⁴⁰ “Wagner Placed on High Plane,” Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, 3 March 1940, 75.

⁴¹ “Letters to The Times,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1939, 14.

⁴² Hiram K. Moderwell, “Should the Artist Think?” *Harvard Musical Review* 2, January 1914, 8.

anti-Semitism (see above), we have evidence for the idea of Wagner's anti-Semitism becoming known in this country. But did that necessarily pertain to *Die Meistersinger* and to New York audiences? Ultimately, it seems as though the degree of anti-Semitism of the time caused the anti-Semitism of *Die Meistersinger* to be far less problematic than the strong German nationalism. In other words, while there may be anti-Semitic overtones in *Die Meistersinger*, this alone did not cause ire among New Yorkers, particularly among the members of the Board at the Met; this did not happen until the very idea of anti-Semitism became repugnant. Moreover, the perceived anti-Semitism of *Die Meistersinger* was simply not part of any discourse surrounding this work until well after the fact, not until there was a greater discourse about anti-Semitism in general. Only then did this issue take on the urgency that it has today. And now this issue nearly overshadows the work itself. But even still there is tendency to over-simplify this multivalent problem. It is too naïve to discount the work as being entirely anti-Semitic or not. It does the work a great disservice.

In all, though *Die Meistersinger* and its perceived anti-Semitism have seemingly become an unsolvable problem, it did not become an important issue with audiences until after the war and its return to the repertoire. Indeed, the specific problem with *Die Meistersinger* prior to that time was the German nationalism as refracted by Hitler's appropriation. Yet despite this, the Met had long had a particularly bipolar relationship with this opera, and the coming conflict would only exacerbate this relationship. That it was chosen as the featured opera for the 1939 World's Fair notwithstanding the troubles that hovered about it attests to this love/hate dichotomy. So, too, does its use as a fundraising tool, since the opera proved particularly useful for tapping into German-

American pockets during the 1930s. There were performances in both 1937 and 1938 that raised funds for the German American Charities, Inc. Of the 1938 performance, Noel Straus of *The New York Times* stated: “This was almost in every respect an unfoldment of the score worthy of a work which, though in its seventieth year of usefulness, still remains unrivaled in the comic opera field.”⁴³

This leads us directly to the most pressing questions. While Hitler certainly saw certain aspects of nationalism and German myth in Wagner, can we hold Wagner responsible? In other words, is Wagner an accessory to the atrocities of Hitler? While this question alone has inspired a cottage industry in literature of late, the real problems begin once we arrive at our answer. For if Wagner is complicit (at least partially), what then do we do with this opera? The Met, in acquiescing to political pressures (to be covered in depth in Chapter 6), tacitly upheld and affirmed the perceived ills within this work. In doing so, the Met set a dangerous precedent whereby any controversial work could be banned. For a modern example, we need only look to the recent storm surrounding the Met’s decision about John Adams’s *The Death of Klinghoffer*. Taking a page straight from the playbook of both Edward Johnson, and Otto Kahn before him, the Met praised itself on its fortitude for keeping the work in the repertoire, while cancelling its HD broadcast. General Manager Peter Gelb stated that, although he did not think the work was anti-Semitic, its broadcast “would be inappropriate at this time of rising anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe.”⁴⁴ Thus when faced with the issue of politics vs. art, it seems that the Met invariably chooses politics.

⁴³ “Special Opera Performance to Aid German American Charities,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1937, 86; Noel Straus, “Wagnerian Opera at Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1938, 18.

⁴⁴ Michael Cooper, “Met Opera Cancels Simulcast of ‘Klinghoffer’,” *New York Times*, 17 June 2014.

CHAPTER 5

PRODUCTIONS AND PERFORMERS (1930 – 1939)

*Habt Acht! Uns dräuen üble Streich:
zerfällt erst deutsches Volk und Reich,
in falscher wälscher Majestät
kein Fürst bald mehr sein Volk versteht,
und wälschen Dunst mit wälschem Tand
sie pflanzen uns in deutsches Land;
was deutsch und echt, wüsst' keiner mehr,
lebt's nicht in deutscher Meister Her!
Drum sag' ich euch:
ehrt Eure deutschen Meister!¹*

As noted earlier, the 1930s was the turning point in the history of *Die Meistersinger* and the Met. The decade was a “perfect storm,” as German nationalism—exacerbated by the Third Reich’s appropriation of the opera—and the pervading anti-German sentiment in New York collided with the reality of European conflict. Briefly, with its strong nationalism, *Die Meistersinger* was now a work espousing questionable ideals and thus had to be reconsidered. There is a paradox here. What once was beloved and beyond reproach was now suspect. Moreover, the paradox was enhanced by the Met’s actions during the 1930s: promoting the opera, on the one hand, while simultaneously and secretly moving to ban it on the other.

¹ “Beware! Evil tricks threaten us: if the German people and kingdom should one day decay, under a false, foreign rule, soon no prince would understand his people; and foreign mists with foreign vanities they would plant in our German land; what is German and true none would know any more, if it did not live in the honor of German Masters. Therefore I say to you: honor your German Masters.” Text cut from Hans Sachs’s speech in Act III of *Die Meistersinger* during the opera’s closing season (1939/1940) at the Met before its World War II hiatus. Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Act III, Scene 5, Piano-Vocal score (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1970): 559-563.

I have provided a brief review of this situation only because of its profound effect on the Met's productions during the years leading up to the war. And it is on these productions that this chapter will focus. How did this paradox play out in the productions themselves? Specifically, what did the Met change (or not change) in any given production to mitigate the growing tension toward the opera at the end of the 1930s? How did it allay (or least delay) any further anti-German or anti-*Meistersinger* backlash? And on a purely practical level, how were the productions affected by the increasing difficulty that performers—especially German nationals—faced in terms of travel restrictions? In all, what were the variables with which the Met had to contend in its productions of this opera, especially in the late 1930s?

PRODUCTIONS

Though there were no new productions of *Die Meistersinger* at the Met during the 1930s, the work still enjoyed great popularity.² Some have even stated that, thanks to “special” performances and casts of superstar singers, the 1930s marked a new “golden age” of Wagner, with *Die Meistersinger* at the forefront.³ As Olin Downes stated early in the decade:

[. . .] it is instructive to realize that today the most popular of all opera composers in America is Wagner. [. . .] It was not always so. Italian and French opera was for many

² The then-current production went back to 1923. Of this production, Lawrence Gilman commented, “Mr. Gatti-Casazza gave the marvelous work last night [. . .] The opera was newly mounted, with scenery by the industrious Professor Kautsky of Vienna.” Lawrence Gilman, “Wagner's 'Meistersinger' in a Notable Revival at the Metropolitan,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 November 1923, 6.

³ In a *New York Times* letter to the editor responding to a comment made by the German musicologist Alfred Einstein in which he stated that the public had grown weary of Wagner, J.R.H. asked: “If the public is bored and fed up with Wagner, it would seem strange that the lyric theatres give so much of him.” J.R.H., “Wagner and the German Public,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1930, 93.

years in the ascendancy. But since the war, and at a time when there were curious reactions of musical tastes in the concert field, Wagner has emerged as the favorite composer of American audiences, if the gatherings at the Metropolitan can be said to be nationally representative [. . .]”⁴

This success was due in part to a recent flock of first-rate performers, clever marketing and packaging of the repertoire, and a press that was sympathetic toward (if not enamored with) *Die Meistersinger*. Over the course of this decade, the Met presented an average of six performances of *Die Meistersinger* per season.⁵ In 1936, one of New York’s leading music critics, Lawrence Gilman of the *New York Herald Tribune*, wrote:

The most endearing of operas returned last night. [. . .] A song that is both profound and blithe, poignant and serene, homespun and magical—music that is set to the wisest and loveliest comedy that ever sprang from a composer’s brain. A score in which essential tragedy is masked by wisdom and serenity, and a richly sonic understanding that fills up all one’s sense of the greatness of the human spirit.⁶

In a similarly laudatory review, the *Tribune*’s Jerome D. Bohm wrote in 1938:

In no other work is Wagner’s unparalleled genius more winningly revealed than in this score, so utterly different from the transcendent passions of ‘Tristan und Isolde,’ the overwhelming tragic grandeur of the ‘Ring,’ and the religious exaltation of ‘Parsifal.’ In ‘Meistersinger’ Wagner’s humanity is revealed as in none of his other creations; his insight into the emotions and foibles of ordinary mortals.⁷

⁴ Olin Downes, “The End of an Epoch: New York’s Opera Enters Period of Transition as Season Closes,” *New York Times* 17 April 1932, X7; “Topics of The Times: 14 Karat Golden Age,” *New York Times* 25 February 1939, 14.

⁵ This number may not seem extraordinary. However, when considered in light of the resources needed to produce this work, and given that today this work is only presented two or three times during a season, and not every season at that, this number of performances is impressive. Gerald Fitzgerald, ed., *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989), 247–329.

⁶ Gilman, “‘Die Meistersinger’ Returns to the Metropolitan with New Singers,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 4 February 1936, 10.

⁷ Jerome D. Bohm, “‘Meistersinger’ Heard for the First Time this Year,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 January 1938, 7.

Remarkable, perhaps, for reviews written in the mid-1930s, is the lack of anti-German sentiment. Furthermore, the critics were still engaging the work directly rather than discussing its execution.

Special Seasons, Benefits, and the Uncut Productions of 1930

In 1930 the Met decided to mount a “special season” of Wagner: a series of Saturday matinees during February and March in which the works would be presented without the customary cuts.⁸ *Die Meistersinger* led off the series on 7 February 1930 with Artur Bodanzky on the podium and Friedrich Schorr as Hans Sachs. Of this performance, Olin Downes wrote: “Honor to the chorus and the incomparable glory of Wagner’s music.”⁹ It was the Met’s first uncut performance of the opera since the 1908/09 season. There was an accompanying lecture series featuring such speakers as Adele Katz and Walter Damrosch.¹⁰ By February, these special Wagner performances had already grossed \$75,000, second only to the \$100,000 in ticket sales for the United States premiere of *Parsifal* in 1903.¹¹ About the uncut productions, Bodanzky stated in an article for *The New York Times* that cuts to Wagner’s works were a singular American phenomena to placate American audiences and should not be done.¹² The reviews of the performance were favorable and the season was considered to be a success,¹³ so much so

⁸ “Wagner ‘Ring’ to be Sung without Cuts,” *New York Times*, 6 January 1930, 27; “Praises ‘Sadko’ Chorus,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1930, 114.

⁹ Downes, “Koussevitzky Gives Prokofieff’s Work,” *New York Times*, 8 February 1930, 19.

¹⁰ An adherent of Heinrich Schenker’s analytic views, Adele Katz (1887-1979) played an important role in fostering a strong Schenker tradition in New York City.

¹¹ “Jeritza Again as Carmen,” *New York Times*, 8 February 1930, 19.

¹² Artur Bodanzky, “For Uncut Wagner,” *New York Times*, 9 February 1930, X8.

¹³ The idea of a season of uncut Wagner was revisited again in 1934. In response to this, three of the most esteemed Wagnerian singers of the time came out strongly in favor of cuts. One of them, Lauritz Melchior, became so famous for his demand for cuts in *Tristan und Isolde*, that the cuts became known as the “Melchior cuts.” “3 Artists Support Plan to Cut Wagner,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1934, 17; Olin Downes, “Koussevitzky Gives Prokofieff’s Work,” 19; Francis

that successive General Managers Gatti-Casazza and Johnson would continue to present the special “Wagner seasons,” and always with *Die Meistersinger* on the bill. These would be either special matinee performances or additional weeks tacked on to the end of the regular seasons. Always successful, these special seasons were a cash cow for the Met and added to the increased popularity of *Die Meistersinger*.

Die Meistersinger was also regularly used as a fundraising tool. Particularly during the second half of the decade, and despite the troubles in Europe, the opera proved useful in tapping into the German population. Thus there were performances in 1937 and 1938 that raised funds for the German American Charities, Inc. As already noted above, critic Noel Straus in 1938 considered the work “unrivaled in the comic opera field.”¹⁴

Other special presentations of *Die Meistersinger* included the end-of-season smaller market tours. At the end of its regular season, the Met would tour such cities as Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Cleveland. *Die Meistersinger* was one of the most requested works on these tours and was regularly featured. These tours were hugely important for the Met, as they were financially successful and quite often offset any losses incurred during the regular season.

But for *Die Meistersinger*, it was in the smaller markets that the conflict surrounding the opera would eventually—even initially—play out. It was in these markets that the opera’s political associations began to come strongly to the fore, and it was there that the questions of possible backlash began to arise. Thus in 1939, pressure mounted to cancel *Die Meistersinger* in three of the planned cities on the tour. Directors

D. Perkins, “Opera Begins Wagner Cycle of Matinees,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 February 1930, 10.

¹⁴ Noel Straus, “Special Opera Performance to Aid German American Charities,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1937, 86; Straus, “Wagnerian Opera at Metropolitan,” *New York Times* 15 January 1938, 18.

from the Rochester Civic Music Association and the New Orleans Opera requested that the opera not be included in that year's repertoire.¹⁵ Yet it was Boston that proved to be most problematic. H. Wendell Endicott of the Boston Opera Association had forwarded a letter to Edward Ziegler from the Schubert publishing house (which had a financial stake in the Boston Opera Association). In it, J. J. Schubert threatened monetary consequences should the opera run: "I have considered everything that you say, and want to help you, I assure you. At the same time we must protect our interest. Inasmuch as you are willing to forfeit \$100,000 in the event we enter the War, this is satisfactory."¹⁶ In the forwarding note to Ziegler, a nervous Endicott requested an insertion of a War Insurance clause in their contract with the Met, one that would have caused the Met to be liable for any financial losses.¹⁷ In a separate letter, the Treasurer of the Boston Opera Association, Oliver Wolcott, asked, "Have you gentlemen had time to think of the effects of the war on opera? While I should not expect it, there is a possibility of some boycotting of Wagner as happened last time [. . .]"¹⁸ The response from Ziegler was brusque, yet vague:

I cannot tell you anything about the effects of the war on opera. Naturally, we have been speculating a great deal on the subject of the war. In the last war we continued our season as originally planned, that is with the full Wagner repertoire for the seasons 1914-

¹⁵ Letter to Edward Ziegler from someone only identified as A.M., Executive Director of the Rochester Civic Music Association, dated 1939, Edward Ziegler Correspondence, Folder A, The Metropolitan Opera Archives. *The New York Times* reported on the situation in New Orleans in "Opera And Concert," *New York Times* 5 February 1939, X7.

¹⁶ Letter from J.J. Schubert to H. Wendell Endicott, dated 1939, Edward Ziegler Correspondence, Folder A, The Metropolitan Opera Archives.

¹⁷ Letter from H. Wendell Endicott to Edward Ziegler, 24 November 1939, Edward Ziegler Correspondence, Folder A, The Metropolitan Opera Archives.

¹⁸ Letter from Oliver Wolcott to Ziegler, dated only September 1939, Edward Ziegler Correspondence, Folder A, The Metropolitan Opera Archives.

1915, 15-16, 16-17. Then when we entered the war in 1917, the seasons 1917-1918 and 1918-1919 contained no Wagner whatever.¹⁹

It appears that Ziegler was hedging with this response. While he admitted outright to the cancellation of Wagner during World War I, he demurred about any action should the United States become involved in the current conflict. The letter also illustrates the disconnect between the Met's public stance and its private responses. For while the Met was "speculating a great deal on the subject of war" and considering its options regarding *Die Meistersinger*, it was still promoting the work heavily, particularly as the featured opera of the 1939 World's Fair.

The 1939 World's Fair

1939 proved to be a pivotal point in the Met's handling of *Die Meistersinger*. The opera reached the zenith of its prestige in New York with its selection as the opening work of the musical portion of the 1939 New York World's Fair. Yet that year would also prove to be the beginning of one of the darkest points in its reception in the city, as it was soon pulled from the Met's schedule.

As both chairman of the World's Fair music committee and a Wagner enthusiast, Olin Downes had a hand in planning *Die Meistersinger* performances and its simulcast on WJZ radio.²⁰ Downes lauded the Fair's music program, and the use of *Die Meistersinger* as the opening work. The Met's Board was behind the performances as long as its financial outlay was minimal. One suggestion to save costs was to have the NBC Symphony led by Arturo Toscanini perform instead of the Met's orchestra. In the

¹⁹ Letter from Ziegler to Wolcott, 18 September 1939, Edward Ziegler Correspondence, Folder A, The Metropolitan Opera Archives.

²⁰ "Opera," *New York Times*, 23 April 1939, 134; "Microphone Presents," *New York Times*, 30 April 1939, 184.

end, the Met agreed to seven specially priced World's Fair performances on the condition that the Fair would guarantee up to \$42,000 in losses.²¹ With respect to the *Die Meistersinger* performance, *The New York Times* reported that the work "played to broad laughs," and that it was "the finest the Metropolitan has to offer."²²

This triumphant performance would be among the last before its five-year hiatus. In addition, this performance was particularly crucial to the history of *Die Meistersinger* at the Met because it was the last production before the Met initiated aggressive actions to ease the tension regarding the work. These actions would mark the final season of *Die Meistersinger* before it was banned.

The Final Season

The Met presented *Die Meistersinger* six times during its final season to great reviews. About the first performance, the *New York Herald Tribune* exuded:

The primary and salient individual characteristic of "Die Meistersinger" is its essential humanity. But further comments must be forgone here upon a work whose hearers, at the close were loath to leave the scene of Walther's triumph by the banks of the Pegnitz and return to the damp pavements of Broadway, Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Street."²³

These triumphant productions occurred in the light of rumors from the previous season that the work would soon be retired. The *New York Herald Tribune* reported that:

²¹ Metropolitan Opera Board Meeting Minutes Notes, 1 April 1938, Metropolitan Opera Board Meeting Minutes Notes, 14 November 1938; Metropolitan Opera Archives; Letter from Edward Johnson to Mr. F.H.B., 15 February 1939, Edward Johnson Papers, 1939 Folder, University of Guelph Archive, University of Guelph Library.

²² "The Opera," *New York Times*, 5 May 1939, 31.

²³ Perkins, "'Meistersinger' Returns to Metropolitan with New Sixtus Beckmesser," *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 December 1939, 45.

[O]ne of the major reasons for gratitude that the Metropolitan did not shelve ‘Die Meistersinger’ this season—which had been rumored as a possibility—and for regret that this was the only performance of this inexhaustible work.²⁴

Thus the presence of these rumors indicated that the Met was already grappling with the question of how to deal with this work. Short of completely pulling it from the repertoire, the Met was left with two options: change the language or cut those parts that would be considered offensive. The Met first considered the question of language, and pondered a *Meistersinger* in English. Wagner had been presented in English before: when *Parsifal* returned after World War I (the first post-war Wagner), it was presented in English; but never had *Die Meistersinger* been so treated. An English presentation of *Die Meistersinger* was first discussed in 1935 by Walter Damrosch in a *New York Times* Letter to the Editor. Writing about the need for opera to be available to a larger audience, Damrosch wrote in favor of an English presentation:

What a pity that ‘Meistersinger,’ which to my mind is the greatest comedy since Shakespeare, should only be enjoyed because of its music, but cannot really be understood because it is sung in a foreign tongue. I am speaking now for those who cannot understand German. [. . .] Opera should and must be preserved. It can no longer be merely a gathering place for the select few. It has got to be democratized. One way to do it is to extend our opera season to last forty-five weeks during the year and lower the prices. The “New Deal” at the Metropolitan Company will include those great American singers who have there demonstrated so nobly the beauty of the English in song.²⁵

Though Damrosch’s suggestion went nowhere, the issue of language was explored again in a note from opera singer Rosamond Chapin to Assistant Manager Edward Ziegler in 1938. Chapin suggested that *Die Meistersinger* be presented in English to accommodate the recent surplus of American singers. Zeigler responded: “I think it is more artistic to

²⁴ “Metropolitan’s ’39-’40 Season to be 16 Weeks,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 28 February 1939, 13.

²⁵ Damrosch, “Opera in English,” *New York Times* 31 March 1935, X6.

give Wagner operas in the original German tongue to which the music was composed and to train our American singer as thoroughly as possible in the German pronunciation.”²⁶

This issue returned yet again in 1939, as calls to present *Die Meistersinger* in English were raised once more. However, this was seen as a conciliatory move hastened by the conflict in Europe. In a *New York Times* Letter to the Editor, Adele Katz stated that *Die Meistersinger* in English as a mitigation of the war was misguided. She continued: “I wonder if this week’s correspondent also considers it un-American to eat German sauerkraut, Polish ham, Italian spaghetti, or Spanish omelette?”²⁷ Ultimately, the idea of an English *Die Meistersinger* was dismissed, and the opera remained in German.

While the Met refused to alter the language, it did excise certain elements of the text that were perceived to be problematic. While cuts to *Die Meistersinger* were quite common, most concerned scenes deemed “non-essential.” For example, it was customary to cut from Act I David’s rather long monologue where he describes to Walther the rules of song construction. It was also customary to cut verses from Walther’s Prize song in Act III. About these, Downes commented, “The cuts [of Walther’s Prize song] are eminently advisable; otherwise we certainly become surfeited with the repetitions of the famous melody.”²⁸ Thus most of the customary cuts do not materially alter the main thrust of the opera. However, during the final 1939/40 season, Erich Leinsdorf (filling in for Artur Bodanzky, who had recently passed away)²⁹ introduced cuts that went directly

²⁶ Letter from Zeigler to Chapin, 31 December 1938, Edwin Zeigler Correspondence, Metropolitan Opera Archive.

²⁷ Katz, “From The Mail Pouch: Opera Repertory Suggestions Question of Opera in English Appeal,” *New York Times*, 12 March 1939, 155.

²⁸ Downes, “‘Meistersinger at Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 29 February 1940, 14.

²⁹ Erich Leinsdorf (1912-1993) had joined the Met as an assistant conductor during the 1937/1938 season and had proven himself to be a capable interpreter of Wagner. With the untimely and tragic death of Artur Bodanzky on 23 November 1939, the Met decided to entrust its entire

to the heart of the opera's German nationalism.

While much of *Die Meistersinger* is a paean to German art and tradition, it is Hans Sachs's final speech that caused the greatest anxiety.³⁰ And it was here, in a performance on 3 December 1939, that Leinsdorf made a telling cut. Specifically, he made a substantial 73-bar / 32-line cut from the end of "Verachtet mir die Meister nicht, und ehrt mir ihre Kunst!" (lines 1-2) to "Dann bannt ihr gute Geister" (lines 35-36). Here are the two versions, first the original, then Leinsdorf's abbreviated one.

Hans Sachs's Finals Speech as Written³¹

1. Verachtet mir die Meister nicht,	Scorn not the Masters, I bid you,
2. und ehrt mir ihre Kunst!	and honour their art!
3. Was ihnen hoch zum Lobe spricht,	What speaks high in their praise
4. fiel reichlich euch zur Gunst.	fell richly in your favour.
5. Nicht euren Ahnen noch so wert,	Not to your ancestors, however worthy,
6. nicht eurem Wappen, Speer noch Schwert,	not to your coat-of-arms, spear, or sword,
7. dass ihr ein Dichter seid,	but to the fact that you are a poet,
8. ein Meister euch gefreit,	that a Master has admitted you -
9. dem dankt ihr heut' eu'r höchstes Glück.	to that you owe today your highest happiness.
10. Drum denkt mit Dank ihr dran zurück,	So, think back to this with gratitude:
11. wie kann die Kunst wohl unwert sein,	how can the art be unworthy
12. die solche Preise schliessest ein?	which embraces such prizes?
13. Das uns're Meister sie gepflegt	That our Masters have cared for it
14. grad' recht nach ihrer Art,	rightly in their own way,

German repertoire to the young Leinsdorf. About the transition from Bodanzky to Leinsdorf, Downes stated: "The surprising thing is what he has done and the measure of brilliant ability that he has demonstrated." Downes, "Opera Conducting: Burden Carried by Leinsdorf this Season," *New York Times*, 4 February 1940, 125.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion and interpretation of Sachs' final speech, its "nationalism," and the emotional persuasiveness of Wagner's music, see: Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, 559-61, also 177-79 and 479-81, in vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

³¹ Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Act III, Scene 5, Piano-Vocal score (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1970): 559-563.

15. nach ihrem Sinne treu gehegt,
 16. das hat sie echt bewahrt:
 17. blieb sie nicht adlig, wie zur Zeit,
 18. da Höf' und Fürsten sie geweiht,
 19. im Drang der schlimmen Jahr'
 20. blieb sie doch deutsch und wahr;
 21. und wär' sie anders nicht geglückt,
 22. als wie wo alles drängt und drückt,
 23. ihr seht, wie hoch sie blieb im Ehr':
 24. was wollt ihr von den Meistern mehr?
 26. Habt Acht! Uns dräuen üble Streich':
 27. zerfällt erst deutsches Volk und Reich,
 28. in falscher wälscher Majestät
 29. kein Fürst bald mehr sein Volk versteht,
 30. und wälschen Dunst mit wälschem Tand
 31. sie pflanzen uns in deutsches Land;
 32. was deutsch und echt, wüsst' keiner mehr,
 33. lebt's nicht in deutscher Meister Ehr'.
 34. Drum sag' ich euch:
 35. ehrt eure deutschen Meister!
 36. Dann bannt ihr gute Geister;
 37. und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst,
 38. zerging' in Dunst
 39. das heil'ge röm'sche Reich,
 40. uns bliebe gleich
 41. die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!

cherished it truly as they thought best,
 that has kept it genuine:
 if it did not remain aristocratic as of old,
 when courts and princes blessed it,
 in the stress of evil years
 it remained German and true;
 and if it flourished nowhere
 but where all is stress and strain,
 you see how high it remained in honour -
 what more would you ask of the Masters?
 Beware! Evil tricks threaten us:
 if the German people and kingdom should one day decay,
 under a false, foreign rule,
 soon no prince would understand his people;
 and foreign mists with foreign vanities
 they would plant in our German land;
 what is German and true none would know,
 if it did not live in the honour of German Masters.
 Therefore I say to you:
 honour your German Masters,
 then you will conjure up good spirits!
 And if you favour their endeavours,
 even if
 the Holy Roman Empire
 should dissolve in mist, for us there would yet remain
 holy German Art!

Hans Sachs's Final Speech with Leinsdorf Cuts³²

1. Verachtet mir die Meister nicht,	Scorn not the Masters, I bid you,
2. und ehrt mir ihre Kunst!	and honour their art!
[Cut text]	[Cut text]
36. Dann bannt ihr gute Geister;	then you will conjure up good spirits!
37. und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst,	And if you favour their endeavours,
38. zerging' in Dunst	even if
39. das heil'ge röm'sche Reich,	the Holy Roman Empire
40. uns bliebe gleich	should dissolve in mist, for us there would yet remain
41. die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!	holy German Art!

In effect, Leinsdorf cut the strong German nationalist language, specifically the reference to the fall of the Holy Roman Empire and Germany falling into foreign hands. At the time of *Die Meistersinger*'s Munich premiere in 1868, Germany was in the throes of pre-Franco-Prussian-war mania. As such, this language was quite suited to the times. But for 1939 audiences in New York, it assumed a more sinister tone. Moreover, this 3 December performance was broadcast on WJZ as part of the Met Saturday broadcasts, and recorded for production as a "Met live" album, so that the opera reached a greatly expanded audience. By far, however, the greatest reason for the cuts was that by December 1939 Europe was at war. On 1 September 1939, Nazi forces had invaded Poland.³³ On 3 September 1939 Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain, and French President, Charles DeGaulle, each declared war on Germany. Now Germany was nearly an official enemy of the United States.

³² The source for these cuts is a live recording made of this performance. Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Metropolitan Opera, conducted Erich Leinsdorf. Walhall 37, recorded live, 3 December 1939, compact disc.

³³ Owing to the German-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939, Germany was able to invade Poland without fear of Soviet recrimination.

In this light, the cuts seemed prudent. Yet the *New York Herald Tribune* and *The New York Times* both questioned them.³⁴ Downes commented:

Was it fear of political reactions which caused that part of Sachs's final address which relates to the greatness of German art and the German people to be cut? No doubt, in the present state of the public mind, precaution in these matters is advisable, but after all, this is Wagner, and we lost some measures of superlative music.³⁵

In a review of a later performance, Downes again mentioned the cut: "[T]he cut of the major part of Sachs's final address is unfortunate and surely unnecessary."³⁶

In the end, the cuts proved insufficient to save the work. *Die Meistersinger* was too representative of Germany and the Third Reich. Despite the glowing reviews, the prestigious position in the World's Fair, and successful ticket sales, the Met would pull *Die Meistersinger* immediately after the 1939/1940 season.

PERFORMERS DURING THE WAR

In 1930 Robert Cohn, Jr., stated in *The New York Times* that the flock of performers had "placed us, while we are unaware, in the midst of a new Golden Age."³⁷ Indeed, with Lauritz Melchior (1890-1973), Friedrich Schorr (1888-1953), Lotte Lehman (1888-1976), Kirsten Flagstad (1895-1962), Max Lorenz (1901-1975), and the conductor Artur Bodanzky, the 1930s proved to be a high point of Wagner performance. For the Germans, times were especially difficult. In 1936, the Nazi Party decreed that all German performers must be members of the *Fachschaftsbühne* (a musical trade

³⁴ "Meistersinger" is Given Again at Metropolitan," *The New York Herald Tribune*, 23 December, 1939, 11. This writer specifically questioned cutting the line, "Das sir in Deutschen Reich."

³⁵ Downes, "Leinsdorf Directs Wagnerian Opera," *New York Times* 3 December 1939, 58.

³⁶ Downes, "'Meistersinger' at Metropolitan," 14.

³⁷ Robert J. Cohn, Jr., "A Golden Age of Opera," *New York Times*, 13 April 1930, 129.

association—part of the *Reichstheaterkammer*)³⁸ and that all foreign engagements were to be negotiated through the *Bühnenachweis* (the Third Reich’s version of Actors’ Equity). A further decree stated that German singers would not be permitted to sing abroad unless they could demonstrate that they were loyal to the party.³⁹ While in Germany in the summer of 1937, The Met’s General Manager Edward Johnson received a visit from one Herr Künley of the *Reichskulturkammer*, who pressed upon him the need to list the performers he wished to secure. According to Johnson’s correspondence on the matter, when he was less than forthcoming, Künley menacingly reminded him that all applications for performers’ contracts had to go through him.⁴⁰ Needless to say, this further complicated what had already become an arduous process. Indeed, by 1939, *The New York Times* reported that Johnson was securing only French and Russian singers, no Germans.⁴¹ For some German performers, this bureaucratic hoop proved to be impossible to leap. Thus as early as 1935, Lotte Lehmann, a celebrated Eva, renounced her German citizenship and became a naturalized United States citizen. She was officially banned from ever performing in Germany again.⁴²

As a result of this impenetrable German-instigated bureaucracy, there was an appreciable increase in American singers at the Met during the second half of the decade.

³⁸ The Third Reich’s Ministry of Art. Entry required an “Aryan Certificate” (*Ariernachweis*), a document proving one’s Aryan descent.

³⁹ This is an institutional version of the ban on performers who had chosen to perform in the United States against the urgings of the Third Reich.

⁴⁰ Cable between Edward Johnson and Edward Ziegler, 25 June 1937, Edward Johnson Collection, 1937 Folder, University of Guelph Archive, University of Guelph Library. Unfortunately, the correspondence does not give Künley’s first name.

⁴¹ “Opera and Concert Asides,” *New York Times*, 27 August 1939, X5.

⁴² “Reich Ban Decreed On Lotte Lehmann,” *New York Times* 10 November 1935, N8. Lehmann’s Eva was considered one of best of the twentieth century. As Downes put it: “A comparatively undramatic part was done beautifully by Mme. Lehmann, and in such an understanding and creative way, that it became a crowning feature of the music drama.” Downes, “Lotte Lehmann As Eva Is Stirring,” *New York Times* 16 March 1934, 25.

It was in 1935 that Edward Johnson began to actively (and quite visibly) seek American talent. This effort had the feel of a political campaign and was launched in response to growing tensions regarding the use of foreign (specifically German) talent.

Representative John H. Hoeppel of California specifically tried to enact a bill that would put the onus on impresarios to exhaust American talent before employing Europeans. He was quoted in *The New York Times* as stating: “It would be well to remember that Congress is now in no mood to witness with complacency the importation of foreign singers while our own are in need of the employment that is given away to foreigners.”⁴³

In a series of well-placed articles and press releases, Johnson discussed the abundance of talented American singers. In the article from *The New York Times* that quoted Congressman John Hoeppel, he stated that American singers were as proficient as their European counterparts and that he believed that “a day will come when our own singers will be looked for over there.”⁴⁴ Paul Cravath, of the Met Board, stated in an article for the *New York Herald Tribune* that American singers had never had more opportunities.⁴⁵ Finally, in a 1936 press release regarding this matter, Johnson said:

My journey through Europe convinced me of one thing – that we in America are in a very enviable position. No country to-day has such a wonderful opportunity to foster and develop its native talent [. . .] We have excellent material among the young singers and also that there is a new public desirous of hearing the old masterpieces performed. It is our mission to prepare a training ground for the aspiring operatic artists of the future.⁴⁶

However, of all the singers, it was the plight of the Jewish singers in particular that was the most poignant. Many either fled Germany, while others perished in the

⁴³ Robert Wilson, “Hope for American Singers,” *New York Times*, 8 August 1935, 16.

⁴⁴ Wilson, “Hope for American Singers,” 16.

⁴⁵ “Cravath Hails Metropolitan Hopes,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, 17 September 1935, 3.

⁴⁶ Press release dated 17 August 1936, Edward Johnson Collection, 1936 Folder, University of Guelph Archives, University of Guelph Library.

camps and ghettos. Friedrich Schorr, the Met's beloved Hans Sachs, was one who had fled early.⁴⁷ A Hungarian Jew, he debuted at the Met in 1923, fled Germany in 1932, and became a naturalized citizen of the United States the following year. It is, of course, ironic that Schorr would sing about the virtues of German Art. In fact, his Jewishness had been a flashpoint of his European career. Hitler referred to him as "that Jew Schorr" in 1925, while in 1930 Siegfried Wagner had apparently hired him *owing to* his Jewishness: he was hired to sing Wotan as part of a tacit campaign to prove that Bayreuth was not anti-Semitic.⁴⁸ Of his Hans Sachs, *The New York Times* stated that his was "some of Wagner's noblest dramatic declamation."⁴⁹ Schorr was beloved at the Met throughout the 1930s, but retired while *Die Meistersinger* was absent during the war. With its seventy-three bar cut, his 1939/1940 Hans Sachs would be his last.

There were other performers (Bruno Walter, for example) who could no longer perform at Bayreuth because they were Jewish. At the same time, there were non-Jews who refused to perform because of this prejudice and persecution. The most celebrated of these was Arturo Toscanini. As early as 1931 Toscanini was vocal in his opposition to Hitler. The *New York Herald Tribune* reported:

After the 1931 [Bayreuth] Festival, the conductor, Arturo Toscanini, an old friend of the Wagner family, quarreled with her [Winifred], charging that she was subordinating

⁴⁷ Schorr is now prominently featured in the current Bayreuth exhibition, "Silenced Voices." This exhibition features cement gravestone-like pillars, each featuring the name and fate of a Jewish performer before World War II. The tombstones symbolically surround the famous bust of Wagner by Nazi sculpture Arno Breker. While this is an attempt on the part of Bayreuth to deal with its past and Wagner's own anti-Semitism, it does deflect much of the responsibility onto Cosima Wagner for setting an anti-Semitic tone for the festival that was then subsequently maintained.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Carr, *The Wagner Clan* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 149.

⁴⁹ "Schorr Greeted at Opera," *New York Times*, 4 January 1930, 17.

Wagner's genius to purposes of Hitlerite propaganda. She denied that she allowed politics to tinge the Bayreuth Festival.⁵⁰

In an op-ed written for *The New York Times* "Topics of The Times" column, an anonymous writer stated:

His protest is peculiarly effective because Richard Wagner bulks so large in the Nazi cult of a purified Aryanism. The primitive setting of a Nibelungenlied is the Heroic Age to which the German people are exhorted to turn for a model. It is now shown that in the case of Toscanini one may be a great Wagnerian and yet detest the gospel of hate preached by his Nazi votaries.⁵¹

After this rift, Toscanini would not conduct at Bayreuth again. He officially resigned on 5 June 1933, stating that he "was unwilling to keep his contract because of the Nazi persecution of Jewish musicians and other artists."⁵² The impact of Toscanini's statement is that it places Wagner within the grand purview of the Third Reich and extolls the virtues of Wagner independent of the Third Reich.

Another celebrated performer who was featured prominently at both Bayreuth and at the Met was Max Lorenz, the celebrated Walther who had debuted at the Met in 1931 and frequently performed with both Lehmann and Schorr.⁵³ He was a favorite of Hitler's and sang in *Die Meistersinger* at the 1934 Nuremberg Rally and virtually every Bayreuth Festival until 1939. Lorenz ceased to perform at the Met in 1934 in order to remain in Germany. His decision paid off, so to speak: as Hitler's favorite tenor, he and his Jewish wife received special protection from Nazi party. Lorenz returned to the Met in 1947.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ "Hitler-Wagner Troth is Likely: Leipzig Hears as 2 Meet Again," *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 February 1933, 1.

⁵¹ "Topics of The Times," *New York Times* 7 June 1933, 20.

⁵² "Bayreuth Hails Jewish Artist and Hitler Too," *New York Herald Tribune*, 22 July 1933, 6.

⁵³ "To Make Debuts at Metropolitan," *New York Times* 4 November 1931, 30.

⁵⁴ "Max Lorenz, Tenor, Dead; Sang in Wagnerian Roles," *The New York Times*, 13 January 1975, 32.

Finally, the Met's ban on *Die Meistersinger* coincided with another blow to its Wagner repertoire: the death of Artur Bodanzky in 1939. In a letter to Edward Ziegler, Joachim H. Meyer of the *New York Staats Zeitung* wrote: "heartfelt sympathies at the untimely death of your conductor Artur Bodanzky. His undying devotion to the cause of Wagner, Strauss and the other masters of music, his unflagging energy were an inspiration to his co-workers and a revelation to all lovers of music."⁵⁵

Though sometimes considered the "Golden Age" of Wagner at the Met, the 1930s—especially the last years of the decade—might also be considered the "Golden Age" of duplicity at the Met. With one face for the public, its management struck quite another face behind the scenes, as it worked to protect itself against ever-growing anti-German sentiment that would unleash its full fury when the United States entered the war.

⁵⁵ Telegram dated 23 November 1939, from Joachim H. Meyer, Editor-in-chief of the *New York Staats Zeitung* to Ziegler, Edward Zeigler Papers, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

CHAPTER 6

DIE MEISTERSINGER AND THE WAR YEARS: ABSENCE, RETURN, AND AFTERMATH

*As is well known, the opera has passages
which could be construed as more than a
touch of German propaganda.¹*

The last performance of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* prior to America's entry into the war was on 28 February 1940, after which it quietly disappeared from the Met repertoire until January 1945. There was no press release, no official statement. The opera simply disappeared for four seasons. Why the secrecy? As noted earlier, Wagner had been removed from the repertoire once before (during World War I), but in that case it had been only after much hand wringing and maneuvering on the part of then General Manager Gatti-Casazza and Chairman Otto Kahn. Moreover, the ban had been enacted in a public manner following a great amount of public discourse. Yet despite their art-before-politics posturing, when the Met issued their initial press release regarding the banning of all Wagner, it came as no surprise. It had to be done.

This previous episode of banning German operas was in stark contrast with Edward Johnson's actions prior to and during World War II. He not only utilized the same duplicity as the Gatti-Casazza/Kahn regime, but he did so far more surreptitiously. Johnson's actions were more extreme in every way. His protestations of music-above-all-else were louder and more ubiquitous, his processes more secretive, and, finally, his self-praise more boisterous when he restored *Die Meistersinger* in 1945. What is even more remarkable about Johnson and the Met during this period was that they maintained a disconnect between public stance and private action throughout the affair. In one

¹ Olin Downes, "Season In Review," *New York Times*, 15 March 1942, X7.

instance, Johnson was quoted in *The New York Times* in 1940 (just months after *Die Meistersinger*'s final performance) as having said: "Opera has nothing to do with nationalism."² Only occasionally did Johnson let his guard down regarding the conflict between *Die Meistersinger* and the prevalent anti-German sentiment. And only with a close examination of Johnson's own words (his correspondence, his speeches, and even unpublished articles) does this disconnect become evident.

THE ABSENCE OF *DIE MEISTERSINGER*

The first inkling that *Die Meistersinger* would carry on in the imagination of the press and public came in Olin Downes's annual review of the Met's 1939/1940 season—the final season of *Die Meistersinger*. While he praises Johnson for his courageous leadership during a troubled time, it was his comments regarding Wagner that are the most revealing:

It can be seen again that Wagner surpassed all others in number of performances [. . .] his works totaled just twice the number of performances that were given the operas of Verdi which is an astonishing reversal of musical conditions in New York from those of earlier years.³

In a *New York Times* article discussing the Met's upcoming 1941/1942 season, Howard Taubman stated that, according to a "company official," *Die Meistersinger* would be absent for "only a season or two." That same un-named official was also quoted as having said:

The war has not caused the Metropolitan to alter its repertoire. Wagner's music dramas remain on the list [. . .] The public is not confusing the true issue in this war. In the World War there was a clamor against the German language, even though the composers

² "Sidelights of the Week," *New York Times*, 28 July 1940, 68.

³ Olin Downes, "Season in Review," *New York Times*, 17 March 1940, 137.

had been dead for a long time. At present the music of Wagner, Richard Strauss, Beethoven, and Mozart is not held responsible for the infamies of the Nazis.⁴

The implication is clear. Although both the Met and the opera-going public were enlightened enough to understand that Nazi aggression was not to be conflated with German opera, *Die Meistersinger* was somehow the outlier, an opera to be excluded from this sense of enlightenment. And in this exclusion, this opera was identified as being “different.” In this exclusion, the Met tacitly confirmed that the opera was problematic.

Meanwhile, Edward Johnson was steadfastly maintaining his public stance of art-above-all-else, both through public statements and in the press. But this is even more apparent in the unpublished drafts for articles found in his archive at the University of Guelph, Ontario. Tucked away in a folder simply marked “1940” is a series of such drafts that outline his philosophy. They show two things: first, that he was actively questioned about a wartime repertoire; and second, that he felt compelled to address the situation. In an undated draft of an article solicited by Robert J. Wade of the *Emerson Quarterly*, Johnson wrote, “What is the inherent value of opera in war-time and how can we best direct our course to serve our country without sacrificing what we believe to be its [opera’s] essential contributions? [. . .] Art and freedom to express it are worth fighting for.”⁵ Yet *Die Meistersinger* is silently excluded from this sentiment. In another draft, in what appears to be an “op-ed” piece, Johnson emphasizes the civic responsibility of the Met to continue as an international institution, above the constraints of war.

⁴ Howard Taubman, “Opera Reopens In Patriotic Key,” *New York Times*, 25 November 1941, 1.

⁵ Edward Johnson, “The Metropolitan Opera and the World Today,” *Emerson Quarterly*, undated draft of an article intended for the *Emerson Quarterly*, 1940 Folder, Edward Johnson Collection, University of Guelph Library, University of Guelph.

Grand Opera is an international institution and if we do our bit by putting on the best show possible we will be obliged to continue with our present repertoire which includes operas composed in Italy and Germany (some years ago) and in some cases sung by artists who had the misfortune to be born in enemy countries.⁶

Further on there is a line that seems especially significant, if only for the penciled correction by Johnson himself. It initially read: “If the splendid causes for which we are fighting could in any way be furthered by a cessation of German Opera, we hope that we would be the first to see it. That is not how we see our duty now.” But, Johnson had crossed out the word, “splendid” and did not replace it. Granted that this is a small point, but it offers a behind-the-curtain glimpse at Johnson’s carefully constructed statements. It also indicates that Johnson may have been questioned about the need to alter the repertoire.

Once the United States had entered the war, the only “official” discussion of the matter at the Met occurred at an emergency Board Meeting on 11 December 1941, the very day on which the United States declared war on Germany and just four days after Pearl Harbor. With the United States now at war against Germany, the Met’s “Wagner problem” was more pressing. The minutes of the meeting read:

Mr. Johnson spoke briefly on the repertoire and the problems inherent in any change of policy as to the performances of foreign operas in foreign languages. He pointed out that Italian and German operas represented the bulk of the repertoire and that artists had been engaged and plans laid for what such artists should sing long before the war situation had developed. It was felt that until the public served by the Association indicated its dissatisfaction with the present management policy and with respect to opera that no change should be made.⁷

Yet even with *Die Meistersinger* having already been excluded from the

⁶ Edward Johnson, No title, Draft, 1940 Folder, Edward Johnson Collection, University of Guelph Library, University of Guelph.

⁷ Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, December 11, 1941, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

repertoire for two seasons, Johnson was still maintaining that nothing should be altered. Moreover, just two months earlier he had written: “I am glad to affirm that the repertoire will be as varied as is our custom, that we will continue to present opera in its original language, that Wagner will still be produced.”⁸ Indeed, as Table 1 shows, the Wagner repertoire (excepting *Meistersinger*) continued unabated for the duration of the war, during which period there were yearly “uncut” Ring cycles as well as the smaller market tours. What is notable is that the number of Wagner performances per year is very high, much higher, in fact, than today. Thus while the atmosphere for *Die Meistersinger* may have proved to have been too difficult, the popularity of Wagner’s other works remained strong.

Table 1: Performances of Wagner Operas other than *Die Meistersinger*, 1940/1941 – 1944/1945

Opera	1940/41	1941/42	1942/43	1943/44	1944/45
<i>Tannhäuser</i>	5	5	6	8	0
<i>Lohengrin</i>	5	8	5	0	7
<i>Das Rheingold</i>	1	1	1	3	2
<i>Die Walküre</i>	6	4	3	6	7
<i>Siegfried</i>	4	2	1	2	2
<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	10	0	5	7	9
<i>Götterdämmerung</i>	4	3	3	2	4
<i>Parsifal</i>	2	4	3	5	3
Total Wagner Per Season	37	27	27	33	34

Source: Metopera.org; <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm>, accessed 3 March 2015.

Johnson was proud of his handling of the *Meistersinger* problem. In a letter to someone identified only as SOJ, he stated in a most self-congratulatory way: “I suppose you have noticed that everything in this war, even to the action of the stock market, has

⁸ Edward Johnson, “A Glad Hand for Opera,” *Opera News* 6, 6 October 1941, 7.

been exactly the opposite of all that occurred in the last war.”⁹ Another letter congratulated him by stating: “[. . .] to the man who has made it possible in these ghastly times for thousands of people to hear the music of the greatest of all opera composers.”¹⁰ Though Johnson was still able to maintain a sixteen-week season, it was with great difficulty. During the 1941/1942 season, Ernest Hutcheson of *The New York Times* commented upon this problem when he stated: “I call on the music-loving public to refrain from musical hysteria [. . .] Let there be no wild talk of banning or limiting the performance of German and Italian music.”¹¹

It was during the 1941/1942 season that there had even been rumors of a *Meistersinger* revival. It was not to be. Olin Downes stated:

On its side the management took care not to raise an issue by performing “Meistersinger,” which had been scheduled for revival, and probably would have been mounted if we had kept out of actual warfare with Germany. As is well known, the opera has passages which could be construed as more than a touch of German propaganda.¹²

Here, Downes appears to be playing the middle. Yet in his private correspondence, he was far more vehement in his defense of both Wagner and *Die Meistersinger*. In a lengthy letter of 18 December 1942 to the Czech music critic Jan Lowenbach (who had just published an article titled “The Dangers of Wagner’s Music”), Downes responded:

My dear friend, I think we are so far apart on this subject that we can hardly touch hands on it. I can well realize that if I had been through what you and Wilma [Lowenbach’s wife] have been through I could not look dispassionately on anything associated even

⁹ Letter from Edward Johnson to SOJ, 20 December 1941, “1941” Folder, Edward Johnson Collection, University of Guelph Library, University of Guelph.

¹⁰ Letter from an uncertain “Richard” of the firm DeCoppet & Doremus, 23 December 1942, 1942 Folder, Edward Johnson Collection, University of Guelph Library, University of Guelph.

¹¹ Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, 11 March 1942, Metropolitan Opera Archives; Ernest Hutcheson, “Appeal For Continuance of Music,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1942, X7.

¹² Downes, “Season in Review,” X7.

indirectly with Nazism and all that the damned German race at this time implies [. . .] In the first place I don't see how we can possibly discount the artistic value and incontrovertible significance to the whole art of music of Richard Wagner's scores [. . .] For my part I do not see how anybody can avoid acknowledging the high moral purpose which lies behind all of the concepts of the Wagnerian operas although they are admittedly open to argument as regards allegedly fascist concepts in certain aspects of his librettos and what some believe to be stylistic degeneracies in his technique and idiom [. . .] I think that we in America would lose one of our greatest advantages in our heritage of the centuries of European music if we allowed our choice and our admiration to be affected by the political considerations however urgent they may be at the moment because of the world crisis which will pass and be no more long before the music of Wagner will have perished.¹³

In a vituperative response to the rumored revival of *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner biographer Ernest Newman stated in *Musical America*, "If any German bass thinks he will soon be doing again what we have so often seen him doing in recent years at the end of the 'Meistersinger'—pointedly using Sachs's final harangue about the superiority of 'holy German art' and the necessity of guarding it against 'foreign mists and foreign trumpery' as a means of showing the English how little he thought of it—he had better think again."¹⁴

As for Edward Johnson's carefully constructed façade of art-before-politics, there is a small glimpse of the actual sentiment behind the unspoken decision to ban *Meistersinger*. Only in an article for *Collier's* by Howard Taubman did this façade slightly crack. Taubman wrote about Johnson: "Then there is Wagner's 'Die Meistersinger', which ends with an apostrophe to the German race and art. Johnson is leery about that opera, and is going to hold off with it for a while." This was the only

¹³ Letter from Olin Downes to Jan Lowenbach, 18 December 1942, Olin Downes Collection, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia.

¹⁴ Ernest Newman, "Music After the War," *Musical America* 3, 10 February 1943, 186.

public reference to Johnson's wariness, the only time that reference to his public stance matched his private action.¹⁵

The Inner Workings of the Met

As much as Edward Johnson was largely responsible for the decisions concerning *Die Meistersinger* during this period, it is important to remember that he did not make them in a vacuum. He had a business to run, and he was planning a course of action that was most beneficial to his organization. And for better or worse, the question of Wagner's operas and their benefit to the organization had always been a controversial issue, even in the quietest of times. As an organization, the Metropolitan Opera operated during the war years in a manner somewhat akin to a dysfunctional marriage.

Throughout most of its history, the Met was constantly embroiled in managerial turmoil. In fact, only now does the old two-headed management system (discussed in Chapter 2) of the Real Estate Company (the wealthy box holders/stockholders) and the Metropolitan Opera Company (the Board) finally break down. Much of this was the result of financial insecurity and the changing face of the wealthy box holders, as all of the original members of the group had by now passed away, and their estates had either been sold or split up. The focus of the problem was ownership of the building itself, which had fallen into terrible disrepair. At one point, there was even talk of selling the building and moving uptown to Rockefeller Plaza.¹⁶ Finally, at the behest of the financier Cornelius Bliss, Jr., the Metropolitan Opera Company purchased the building from the Real Estate

¹⁵ Howard Taubman, "Boss of the Opera," *Collier's*, 6 December 1941, 83.

¹⁶ Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, 14 November 1938; January 11, 1939; Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Company.¹⁷ The Board also discussed expanding itself to include such notable New Yorkers as Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, albeit as a means to give the organization a more “public friendly” face.¹⁸

With all of this, there was a constant push-pull between Johnson spelling gloom at the outset of each season, and then triumphantly announcing that the season was a great success at its end. For the 1942/1943 season the Met managed to maintain solvency and even extend the customary sixteen-week season to twenty weeks.¹⁹ Johnson stated: “It is no secret that only a few months ago there was every possibility that there would be no 1942/1943 opera season. Financial problems, artistic complications, availability of artists, questionable public interest and war-time difficulties.”²⁰ In May 1944 Johnson could even announce that the company had had its most successful season to date.²¹

Johnson’s Push for Americans

Among the war-time problems that the Met experienced were those related to travel and “loyalties.” There were performers, American and otherwise, who found themselves on the wrong side of the conflict. Some were singers—German and non-German—who were in Germany both before and during the conflict. Some were singers

¹⁷ The price was \$1.97 million, with half in cash up front and the other half as a mortgage. Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, 14 April 1939, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

¹⁸ One of the most influential members of the Real Estate Company, Clarence MacKay, had passed away in 1938 after a prolonged illness. What is notable about MacKay was his constant vocal opposition to the Wagner repertoire. He was instrumental in pushing Gatti-Casazza and Kahn to ban Wagner during the First World War. It is possible that with his death, the conflicts concerning the Wagner could have been allayed. Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, 28 June 1939, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

¹⁹ Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, 29 April 1943, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

²⁰ Speech at the Philadelphia Academy of Music, 10 November 1942, “Miscellaneous” Folder, Edward Johnson Collection, University of Guelph Library, University of Guelph.

²¹ Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, 8 May 1944, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

who found themselves stuck in the United States. Johnson, then, used homegrown American talent to replace those in Germany. Just as Gatti-Casazza looked toward American composers to fill in the repertorial gaps during World War I, so Johnson looked to American singers to fill the roles vacated by performers unable or unwilling to travel. As he put it in the *Emerson Quarterly* article:

One new approach to the world of today is the increased importance of the American singer; the need for his training in this country, the necessary opportunity for his development and the expression of his talents. We must seize the proper moment to further the development of a national art. Just as our country has forged its national identity from the peoples who crossed the ocean to seek refuge on its shores, so the Metropolitan would build from the heritage of Europe an art that is truly American.²²

Thus Johnson openly cultivated American singers, and, in a move that was initially unheard of at this time, hired an American, Edwin McArthur, who was chosen to conduct Wagner.²³ During an on-air interview with Sir George Campbell broadcast from the Met, Johnson said: “Ten years ago the Metropolitan was in many respects a foreign opera house. Today that is changed. Instead of a few American singers, at the present time our ratio of Americans to foreigners is practically two Americans out of every three.”²⁴

Of the performers, American or otherwise, who had performed for the Nazis and then intended to return, Downes had this to say:

Behold next season the return to these shores of foreign artists known to have been sympathetic to the “master race” and to have condoned its deeds. They will vehemently disclaim any voluntary commerce with the strutting gangsters of yesteryear or the rewards they gratefully accepted from them for their allegiance; and none will whine louder than these returned supplicants for public favor, or be more vociferous in pleading

²² Johnson, “The Metropolitan Opera and the World Today,” draft of article for *Emerson Quarterly*, 1940 Folder, Edward Johnson Collection, University of Guelph Library, University of Guelph.

²³ “Opera and Concert Asides,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1941, X7.

²⁴ Metropolitan Opera Broadcast, Sir George Campbell/Edward Johnson, delivered from the Metropolitan during the Saturday Afternoon Broadcast, 31 March 1945.

that the past be forgotten in the name of art and humanity and the fat incomes they hope again to reap from American audiences.²⁵

Of the American singers who replaced them: “We mean the American boys and girls whose talents and hard work kept in existence our orchestras and opera houses, including the operations of the greatest center of music-drama now in the World—the Metropolitan.”²⁶ In response to this article, Downes received a letter from a Ms. Annie Friedberg, who stated: “I am so happy that you wrote about the artists who have left America to appear for the Nazis, and then may have the audacity to come back to America after the war [. . .] especially the singers who perhaps will camouflage their actions in leaving this country for Europe at the beginning of the war, and now want to tell us that they did not sing for the Nazis.”²⁷

THE RETURN OF *DIE MEISTERSINGER*

According to the minutes of meetings of the Met’s Board of Directors, Johnson had first spoken of restoring *Die Meistersinger* to the repertoire in 1944. He referred to restoring “certain operas.” This most certainly refers to *Die Meistersinger*, since nothing else was restored during the 1944/1945 season.²⁸ In a press release of 10 October 1944, Johnson triumphantly announces the return as if it were a victory unto itself.

One of the by-products of wars is that they serve as bases for measuring and testing cultural developments as well as military strategy and tactics. Opera, for example, suffered from public hysteria during the last war when it was dependent upon foreign artists. Since World War II, however, the opera has made gains, rather than losses [. . .]

²⁵ Downes, “Priorities,” *New York Times*, 20 May 1945, X4.

²⁶ Downes, “Priorities,” X4.

²⁷ Letter from Annie Friedberg to Olin Downes, 22 May 1945, Series 2, Box 25, Folder 46, Olin Downes Collection, University of Georgia.

²⁸ Minutes from the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, 14 December 1944, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Prominent among the revivals will be Wagner's comedy-opera *Die Meistersinger*, last given at the Metropolitan during the season 1939-1940.²⁹

Thus in January of 1945, just a few weeks after the Allied victory at the Battle of the Bulge, *Die Meistersinger* triumphantly returned to the Met.³⁰ The revival was one of the most successful productions of the season, with tickets selling out in just two hours. Using a lavish and expensive set borrowed from the Chicago Opera Company, the return was widely reported in the New York press. It was first announced in *The New York Times* on 1 January 1945, as much as anything else in order to promote the conductor George Szell,³¹ who excitedly mentioned the upcoming performance in a letter to Downes dated 22 December 1944.³² The revival caused great excitement. Robert Wahls of *The Daily News* stated: "It happened last night, at the Met. 'It' is the intangible glow that envelops a theatre in which something wonderful is happening."³³ Virgil Thomson, never a Wagner enthusiast, wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune*: "'Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg' which was given again at the Metropolitan Opera House last night after an interval of five years, is the most enchanting of all the fairy-tale operas [. . .] The

²⁹ Press Release, 10 October 1944, from Metropolitan Opera Association, 1944 Folder, Edward Johnson Collection, University of Guelph Library, University of Guelph.

³⁰ We might note that the New York Philharmonic had presented the Vorspiel at the beginning of 1945. Noel Straus, "Leonard Rose Impressive as 'Cello Soloist in Dvorak Concerto with the Philharmonic,'" *New York Times*, 7 January 1945, 38.

³¹ George Szell debuted at the Met in 1942 and was eventually hired to replace Eric Leinsdorf. Szell would leave in 1946 to conduct the Cleveland Orchestra. "Die Meistersinger to Return on Jan. 12," *New York Times*, 1 January 1945, 28; "Leinsdorf Named to Rodzinski Post," *New York Times*, 1 April 1943, 26; "George Szell Named to Cleveland Posts," *New York Times*, 25 January 1946, 22.

³² Letter from George Szell to Olin Downes, 22 December 1944, Series 2, Box 59, Folder 21, Olin Downes Collection, University of Georgia.

³³ Robert Wahls, "Szell & Company Give Wonderful 'Meistersinger'," *The Daily News*, 13 January 1945, 15.

performance all through was charming, intelligible and a pleasure to this lustily anti-Wagnerian opera fan.”³⁴

Probably the most effusive critic, though, was Downes:

[L]ong overdue, restored last night to the repertoire of the Metropolitan Opera Company. For no other opera heard thus far this winter appears to have aroused such enthusiasm. This was due, in the first place, to the glory of the music, and in the second place to an interpretation, which as a whole was the finest in its spirit and its ensemble of any that the writer has seen at the Metropolitan in twenty years of music reporting in this city.³⁵

He finished by stating that, “It was a most exciting and engrossing reading of an unparalleled score which received the welcome that it had earned, and that should be repeated by the Metropolitan as often as possible.”³⁶

No one, though, was as ebullient about the revival as Edward Johnson: “The American public deserves a pat on the back. By its response to our projected revival it has shown a growing maturity. During the last war all German-language opera had to be dropped from the repertoire, but during this one we have continued to give Wagner operas regularly.” Further, he could see little to justify *Die Meistersinger*’s connection with the Nazis, though the article in which he was quoted opened by stating that *Meistersinger* was Hitler’s favorite opera. Johnson further stated: “[...] a careful examination of the score would show that ‘Lohengrin’ is just as Germanic in philosophy as ‘Meistersinger,’ if not more so.”³⁷

This marks the first time that Johnson made any public statement regarding the work and its link to the Third Reich. Yet that this connection was still a factor is evidenced by a *New York Times* writer stating that the performance was: “A personal

³⁴ Virgil Thomson, “Fairytale About Music,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 January 1945, 7.

³⁵ Downes, “Szell Conductor of ‘Meistersinger’,” *New York Times*, 13 January 1945, 15.

³⁶ Downes, “Szell Conductor of ‘Meistersinger’,” 15.

³⁷ Mark A. Schubart, “Meistersinger Returns,” *New York Times*, 7 January 1945, X5.

triumph for Edward Johnson who worried that it might be found to be politically objectionable because of its praise for Germany.”³⁸ Once again, Johnson commented upon the opera’s connection with the Third Reich, but now only to say that the conflict was resolving itself and the opera was restored. Could it be that Johnson felt more at liberty to discuss this connection now that the war was nearing its end, or was it simply that he felt less pressured about the connection itself?

One factor, however, shows that Johnson still felt keenly about the conflict surrounding *Die Meistersinger*. Despite the lavish revival, the expensive production, and the superstar conductor, Johnson retained the cuts (including that in Hans Sachs’s Act III speech) that Leinsdorf had introduced in the production prior to the war. Thus despite “America deserving a pat on the back for its continued maturity,” Johnson was sufficiently concerned about the Nazi inferences that he eliminated Sachs’s final “harangue about the superiority of ‘holy German art’.”³⁹ Apparently he thought it was too soon for that text’s return. Olin Downes, who had been against the cuts in 1940, pondered those cuts once again, “Let us hope that an uncut ‘Meistersinger’ can be had before the end of the season.”⁴⁰

Die Meistersinger was the greatest success of the 1944/1945 season, both financially and “politically.” Looking back on that season in an article for the *Musical Digest*, Johnson himself remarked: “There is no iron curtain on music.”⁴¹ In fact, it was no longer toxic even to the smaller markets, those same small markets that had exerted such pressure on Johnson to pull the opera before the war. And it was at one such

³⁸ “The World of Music,” *New York Times*, 21 January 1945, 47.

³⁹ Newman, “Music After the War,” 186.

⁴⁰ Downes, “Full House Hears ‘Meistersinger,’” *New York Times*, 11 February 1945, 41.

⁴¹ Edward Johnson, “American Opera,” *The Musical Digest*, January 1947, 6.

performance that a most extraordinary event occurred. On 17 April 1945, the opera was performed in Cleveland. At the end of Hans Sachs's speech, immediately after, "Die heilige deutsche Kunst," John Garriss, who had performed David, carried out an American flag and presented it to Frederic Gynrod, that evening's Sachs.⁴² The significance was telling. As it happens, it was on that very day that the United States 7th Army had surrounded Nuremberg in the battle for the city; and on 20 April, the American flag was raised over Adolf Hitler Platz, bringing the battle to an end. Just seventeen days later, on 7 May, Germany officially surrendered to the Allies.

We might joke that this is the type of ironic ending that could only occur in opera. The city that had been the crown jewel of the Third Reich, that had come to represent the very mythology of Nazi Germany, its symbolic "heart," had now had its namesake opera, an integral part of the myth, "topped off" with an America flag. In effect, the Cleveland *Meistersinger* of 17 April 1945 ended by celebrating the defeat of the very regime that had chosen to misappropriate and even misuse the opera.

THE AFTERMATH

While the Cleveland performance was highly symbolic, its coverage in the press signaled problems that would soon follow. As *Newsweek* put it:

Richard Wagner would have blown a fuse. At a Metropolitan Opera performance of 'Die Meistersinger' in Cleveland last week, the apprentice David (John Garriss) carried in the Stars and Stripes and presented it to Sachs (Frederic Gynrod) as the greatest Mastersinger of them all finished singing: 'If the holy German empire should fall to pieces, we still will have our holy German art.'⁴³

About what, one wonders, would Richard Wagner have blown a fuse: that Nuremberg

⁴² "US Flag, Army Tribute, Appears in Wagner Opera." *New York Times*, 19 April 1945, 23.

⁴³ "Red, White, and Blue Wagner," *Newsweek* 25, 30 April 1945, 88.

had fallen to the Americans, or that an American flag intruded upon his opera? In a way, the article gets to the very heart of the problem that began when Hitler decided to make *Meistersinger* part of his ritual. Richard Wagner would now be part-and-parcel of the Hitler myth, and *Die Meistersinger* would now be irrevocably intertwined with Nazi mythology.

The first decade after the war saw the issue brought up repeatedly. In a July 1945 interview, the conductor Dr. Fabien Sevitsky called for a twenty-year plan to re-educate Germans musically, stating that “[. . .] Germans have been dominated emotionally by Wagnerian blood-music, even as their thinking has been dictated by the arrogant systems of German philosophers.”⁴⁴ The Austrian-American (and Jewish) musicologist Paul Nettl responded to this letter:

It would seem absurd for us to pose as the guardians of the Germans in the field of music where they have held the leading position for 200 years. One must show the Germans the havoc wreaked by the Nazis in the realm of music; how the entire German music development was doomed to stagnation by the Nazis’ introduction of the monstrous concept of “Kultur-bolschevismus” and by anti-semitism. [. . .] The re-education of the Germans must begin by leading them back to their own great past.⁴⁵

He further called for the “eradication of the fake Nazi doctrine in the field of musical philosophy.” He defended Wagner: “As for Wagner, he never harbored anything even remotely resembling Nazi ideas.”⁴⁶

Thus decades before the idea of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* vis-à-vis the Third Reich became a source of debate among present-day scholars and audiences, the dialectic had been established. The line was firmly drawn within months of the revival of the opera. Either *Die Meistersinger* was guilty of sins committed decades after its

⁴⁴ “Wants Blood Music Banned in Germany,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 24 July 1945, 12.

⁴⁵ Paul Nettl, “Under Postage: Germany’s Musical Future,” *New York Times*, 19 August 1945, X4.

⁴⁶ Nettl, “Under Postage: Germany’s Musical Future,” X4.

composition or it was a victim of misuse. Either Wagner was a proto-Nazi or he had been misrepresented. Even as recently as 2012, the Wagner-Nazi association was present in national discourse. Zachary Woolfe, arts writer for *The New York Times* and the *New York Observer*, wrote of an incident at Bayreuth where the baritone Evgeny Nikitin cancelled his performances as the Dutchman when it was discovered that he possessed what looked like a swastika tattoo, apparently the product of his heady days as a young, Russian heavy-metal musician. The singer denied that he meant to cause harm; nor did he realize the history involved. The issue for Woolfe, then, was neither the Nikitin tattoo nor the singer's obtuseness. Rather, the issue lay with the composer, his family, their festival, and their seeming lack of apology for all that occurred during the 1930s and 1940s—this despite the “Silenced Voices” exhibit then going on at Bayreuth.⁴⁷ It was almost as if Woolfe blamed Wagner and his family for Nikitin's tattoo. As he wrote: “[T]he festival did not make a mere foray into Nazism.” Rather, “Proto-Nazi ideals of racism, rabid nationalism and ethnic cleansing were at the core of Wagner's conception of Bayreuth, a conception carried through with intense loyalty by his family after his death in 1883.”⁴⁸ While this is untrue and intellectually lazy, it does epitomize a certain persistent belief that Wagner and Hitler were bound together with *Die Meistersinger* as the common thread.

With the end of Edward Johnson's tenure in 1950, the new General Manager, Rudolf Bing, significantly altered the repertoire at the Met, and it soon came to closely resemble that of today. This repertoire consists predominantly of Italian operas, with a

⁴⁷ As detailed in Chapter 5, the “Silenced Voices” exhibit displayed gravestone-like memorials of deceased Jewish performers (perished during World War II) surrounding the Arno Breker bust of Wagner.

⁴⁸ Zachary Woolfe, “Critic's Notebook: Whiff of Scandal Lingers in Bayreuth,” *New York Times*, 26 July 2012, C1.

smattering of Wagner, whose works do not approach in terms of the number of performances what they had been when the Wagner cult was in its heyday during the fin-de-siècle or even during the 1930s. *Die Meistersinger* is no longer performed every year, and when it is performed, there are far fewer performances than in seasons before the war. In a letter to Olin Downes dated 24 January 1953, a Dr. Gottlieb expressed his despair about the matter:

So I think the few Germans and Austrians, who have an aversion against Wagner, should not be important enough to influence the repertoire of the 'Met'. So I think, it's a "crimen per omissionem" of Mr. Bing [. . .] and I would be indebted to you, if you could do something for Wagner [. . .] All in all, Mr. Bing plays too much Italian opera instead of establish an equilibrium between Italian, German and French operas.⁴⁹

Of course, there was little Downes could do. The die had been cast. The public would no longer view *Die Meistersinger* as it had before the war. And the Met, unfortunately, was complicit in this.

⁴⁹ Letter from Dr. Gottlieb to Olin Downes, 24 January 1953, Series 2, Box 59, Folder 21, Olin Downes Collection, University of Georgia.

CONCLUSION

“In fact, the only problem was ultimately Wagner himself. Sachs’s final aria is chilling with its militant call for honor to German Masters and for rejection of foreign influences.”¹

THE HISTORY

As stated in the Introduction, Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* is unique in the annals of New York's Metropolitan Opera: it is the only opera that was ever banned twice for political reasons, both times the victim of anti-German sentiment caused by two World Wars. Moreover, it was the only Wagner opera to be banned during World War II, this owing to the collision of the work's strong nationalism and the rampant anti-German sentiment of the time. And while the ban itself was never actually acknowledged by the management of the Met, the opera's absence was apparent for all to see.

This dissertation traced the career of *Die Meistersinger* at the Met from its premiere in 1886. To provide the proper context for that occasion, I backed up and considered Wagner's popularity in New York City even before the opera arrived. I then looked at both the publication of his prose works in *Dwight's Journal of Music* in the 1850s and the first production of his music in the United States, a performance of the finale of *Tannhäuser* performed by Carl Bergmann and the Germania Society in 1854. With these two events, a seemingly never-ending dialectic began. From that point forward, a sense of polarization emerged: one was either for Wagner or against Wagner. This tension would play out repeatedly over the next century and a half. In fact, the

¹ Edward Rothstein, “New Met ‘Meistersinger’ Aims for Literalism,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1993, 11.

dialectic is still present today with much of the same vitriol as was heard in the nineteenth century. And throughout this discourse, *Die Meistersinger* has figured prominently. The opera has been part of the Wagner controversy throughout its history at the Met; it has always been a lightning rod for criticism aimed toward the composer.

As noted in Chapter 1, the opera's Met premiere in 1886 received mainly rave reviews, the few detractors bemoaning the overall length (almost five hours) and heavy-handed humor. Early criticism of the work touched upon its nationalism, the ideas of "German-ness," as well as Wagner's theories of art and his views of himself as reformer. But at this time, of course, the nationalism was not yet the problem that it would become in the twentieth century.

Although the dawn of the twentieth century saw a decline of the Wagner cult, *Die Meistersinger* held a position of prominence within the repertoire. The Met had by now settled into the dysfunctional management model of having two ruling bodies whose agendas tended to conflict. One of these, the Real Estate Company (comprised of the wealthy box holders known as the Golden Horseshoe), tended to disdain Wagner, and was frequently at loggerheads with the other ruling body, the Metropolitan Opera Company. And though the Real Estate Company tended to prefer the "lighter touch" of Italian opera, Wagner proved to be a dependable cash cow. This push-pull caused endless conflict, and would finally come to a head with the added pressure of World War I. *Die Meistersinger* was banned, as was—unlike the situation during World War II—all Wagner and all German-language opera. The anti-German sentiment during the 1910s was extremely virulent and ugly, and much of it (at least in circles of "high culture") was focused directly at German opera. Thus the Italian-vs.-German conflict

between the two ruling bodies finally boiled over; and the Golden Horseshoe saw an opportunity to “break” with German opera, at least for the duration of the war. In the end, the management team of Giulio Gatti-Casazza and Otto Kahn simply eliminated all operas in the German language. It was a wonderfully elegant solution, one that countered anti-German sentiment with a rousing pro-American stance of its own. The Met issued press releases stating that changes in popular sentiment in tandem with the “Trading with the Enemy Act” were the main reasons for the ban. What is telling, and what was to be played out again during World War II, was the Met’s insistence that it was placing art above petty politics when it was, in fact, knowingly doing the opposite.

When *Die Meistersinger* was eventually restored in 1923 (yes, it took four years), it was with a new production to glowing reviews. At least for a while, the “victors” could absorb the opera’s nationalism.

The 1930s were a major turning point for *Die Meistersinger*. The rise of fascism in Europe and, most importantly, the subsequent appropriation of the opera by the Third Reich made this already problematic work much more so. It is during this decade that the opera’s nationalism once again ran head-on into the prevailing anti-German sentiment, particularly at the end of the decade. The initial association between Wagner and Hitler resulted from the latter’s close relationship with the composer’s family. That Hitler was an avid fan of the composer was well known; that Hitler was quite cozy with the Wagner family was also well known. Moreover, the Wagner-Nazi ties came to be associated specifically with *Die Meistersinger* when, beginning with the Bayreuth Festival and Nuremberg Rally in 1933 and continuing throughout the rest of the decade, the Third Reich made the opera an important part of its rituals. *Die Meistersinger* came to be

viewed, both by Germans and by non-Germans, as part of the Nazi mythology.

Even more telling, though, was how this came to be viewed in the United States, especially in New York, whose local press had an extensive network of correspondents in Germany throughout the 1930s who were only too eager to cover *Die Meistersinger*'s esteemed position within the Third Reich. Reports of Hitler viewing *Die Meistersinger* during the rallies or at special performances at Bayreuth were frequent. In all, New York audiences as well as the management of the Met quickly became aware of Hitler's fondness for this opera, and the next logical step was to equate certain readings/aspects of the opera with the policies of the Third Reich itself. Thus the marriage of the Third Reich to *Die Meistersinger* was inevitable, or put another way: *Die Meistersinger* came to be seen as a Nazi opera. Indeed, not performing *Die Meistersinger* became an act of patriotism, as art intersected with politics.

There were, of course, many contradictions during this time. As much as the Third Reich made use of this work, *Die Meistersinger* nevertheless remained popular at the Met until the very end of the decade, for this was, after all, a "Golden Era" for Wagnerian singers: Friedrich Schorr, Max Lorenz, Kirsten Flagstad, and Lauritz Melchior. The opera was also a staple of the Met's tours and was featured during the 1939 World's Fair.

Thus the Met held onto *Die Meistersinger* as long as it could, even going so far as to institute the so-called Leinsdorf cuts, which purged those passages that were most closely associated with German nationalism and therefore offensive, most famously Hans Sachs's final speech. In the end, though, even that was not enough; and Johnson, the Met's General Manager, felt he had no choice other than, as of 28 February 1940, to

cancel the work for the duration of the war. There was, however, one important difference as compared with the situation during World War I: whereas Gatti-Casazza and Kahn had issued official press releases and were outspoken about their reasons for banning *Die Meistersinger*, Johnson did it silently, without ever making a public announcement, either officially or otherwise. Indeed, he was quite outspoken in the opposite direction: he explicitly stated in speeches and in print that the Met would not alter its repertoire in face of the growing conflict, and this after it had already done so. Thus while spinning a wonderful—and duplicitous—tale about the universality of opera, Johnson saved his hide, as it were. He cancelled a work he swore he would not cancel and then praised himself when he returned that same work to the repertoire after the war.

When *Die Meistersinger* was restored in 1945, it was with much fanfare and, once again, to great reviews. Much of the New York press and New York audiences heralded the return. Yet Johnson chose to keep the Leinsdorf cuts to Sachs's final speech. Was Johnson "still leery"² about this work, and did he choose to appease a war-weary audience? Whatever the case and despite the triumphant return of the work (and eventually the restoration to Sachs's ode to German art), *Die Meistersinger* was never to regain the prominence it had held before World War II. Never again would it be performed every season; and when it was performed, the number of performances would never again match pre-war levels. Though a favorite among Wagner's operas, it would never hold a privileged position within the Met's repertoire.³ In fact, one of the casualties of the war was the German-heavy repertoire in general. Beginning with Rudolf

² Howard Taubman, "Boss of the Opera," 83.

³ As a testament of sorts to its loss of privilege, we may note that, in the twenty-first century, it has been mounted only twice; first in 2007/2008 and then again in 2014/2015. After this it is not planned again until the 2019/2020 season.

Bing's tenure in 1950, the repertoire veered heavily Italian, with Verdi and Puccini being the most-often performed composers, and with Wagner being demoted to one or two productions per season.

CURRENT PRODUCTIONS

As of this writing (in Spring 2015), the Met has finally retired the long-standing 1993 *Die Meistersinger* produced by Otto Schenk with sets designed by Gunther Schneider-Siemssen. Beginning with their production of *Tannhäuser* in 1977, the Schenk/Schneider-Siemssen productions of Wagner have been a dependable staple at the Met. These productions have been comparable to the beloved Franco Zefferelli productions of Puccini, Verdi, and Bizet: traditional to a fault, slightly old-fashioned, and absolutely safe. Not usually known for its risky productions, the Met's Schenk/Schneider-Siemssen productions came on the heels of the controversial Patrice Chereau *Ring* cycle for Bayreuth in 1976 (which included the Rhine Maidens singing whilst sitting atop a hydroelectric dam and a Valhalla that resembled the New York skyline complete with the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings).⁴ In fact, the Schenk/Schneider-Siemssen productions appeared to be a response to that controversy. While the universality and timelessness of Wagner's works lend themselves to creative staging (much in the same manner as Shakespeare's), the Met's production was the antithesis to more modern and creative productions. It was the purist's delight, but it was *passé* and staid. The production features a true-scale St. Catherine's Church in Act I, a near-perfect replica of Nuremberg in Act II, and a meadow near the River Pegnitz in Act

⁴ Harold Schonberg stated of this production, "The Bayreuth Festival took a big gamble on him [Chereau]. It was a gamble that did not pay off." "Bayreuth 'Ring' Ends in Uproar," *New York Times*, 31 July 1976, 43.

III, all of which strictly adheres to Wagner's own staging. Yet this production looked nearly identical to every past production, particularly at the Met.

Die Meistersinger was the longest running of the Schenk/Schneider-Siemssen productions. In a review of the 1993 premiere, Edward Rothstein of *The New York Times* stated, "Otto Schenk has again made a case for traditionally staged Wagner at the Met."⁵ In a review from its final season, *The New York Times* referred to it as "Otto Schenk's lovingly traditional production."⁶ And while this production was much beloved, one can argue that it failed to engage with the more problematic elements within the work. When *Die Meistersinger* returns for the 2019/2020 season, the Met will mount the production launched at the Salzburg Festival in 2013 by director Stefan Herheim, a production *The New York Times* called "fresh, charming and perceptive."⁷ Rather than taking place in a replica of Nuremberg, the new production is set on Hans Sachs's cluttered desk amid books, poems, jotted notes and features fairy tale characters, and, in the final scene, giant puppets. While this production may not necessarily get to the heart of the problems of *Meistersinger*, it is at the very least an imaginative retelling.

Could it be that a reimagining of *Meistersinger* is necessary in order to exorcise the demons within the work? One of the more controversial recent retellings of *Die Meistersinger* has been the largely loathed Katharina Wagner (the great-granddaughter of the composer) production at Bayreuth. Premiered in 2008 but subsequently retooled, this was her first effort after her appointment as co-Director of the Bayreuth Festival (she co-directs with her half sister, Eva Wagner-Pasquier, both daughters of Wolfgang Wagner).

⁵ Edward Rothstein, "New Met 'Meistersinger' Aims for Literalism," *New York Times*, 16 January 1993, 11.

⁶ Anthony Tommasini, "Production's Retirement Party," *New York Times*, 3 December 2014, C1.

⁷ Anthony Tommasini, "Fresh Memo From a Desk Full of Song," *New York Times*, 5 August 2013, C1.

While this production attempted to make a bold statement about the contradictions within Wagner's ideas of art and their execution at Bayreuth (Walter, as street artist, splashing graffiti over a Dürer; Goethe and Bach, with overly large heads wearing diapers, tying Sachs to a chair and performing a tribal dance around him), it, too, failed to tackle the issues inherent within the opera itself.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As stated at the outset of this dissertation, World War II and the years leading up to it mark a stark turning point in the reception and perception of *Die Meistersinger*. After the war, its nationalism caused (and continues to cause) great discomfort to many audiences. But it was not until later that the anti-Semitism in the work became a factor. Indeed, anti-Semitism had no bearing on the Met's decision to cancel. Nor was it even an issue for wartime audiences. Though a scholarly engagement with Wagner's anti-Semitism had always been somewhat present in the discourse surrounding the composer, it only began in earnest after Theodor Adorno's 1952 *In Search of Wagner*, in which he outlines Wagner's villains.

The contradiction between mockery of the victim and self-denigration is also a definition of Wagner's anti-Semitism. The gold-grabbing, invisible, anonymous, exploitative Alberich, the shoulder-shrugging, loquacious Mime, overflowing with self-praise and spite, the impotent intellectual critic Hanslick-Beckmesser—all the rejects of Wagner's works are caricatures of Jews. They stir up the oldest sources of the German hatred of the Jews and, at the same time, the romanticism of *The Mastersingers* seems on occasion to anticipate the abusive verses that were not heard on the streets until sixty years later.⁸

Adorno unambiguously addresses the anti-Semitism aimed at Beckmesser and lays the blame at Wagner's door. But *Die Meistersinger*'s anti-Semitism came to be

⁸ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 13.

studied with a microscope only in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Barry Millington, Robert Gutman, Paul Lawrence Rose, Stewart Spencer, and David Levin, among others, unflinchingly took up the anti-Semitism with a nuanced specificity.⁹ Soon thereafter, the discourse became vituperative, with such other scholars as Hans Rudolf Vaget and Charles Rosen joining the fray. There is a certain irony here, for much of the dialectic occurred in connection with the Met's conservative, non-political, Schenk/Schneider-Siemssen production of the opera. Nor is it neither ironic nor coincidental that this debate was also concurrent with Daniel Goldhagen's 1996 *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. This book threw ordinary Germans into the Holocaust with great controversy, especially since it appeared at a time when Germany was struggling with its identity regarding the atrocities of World War II. Yet it also generated renewed vigor in the discussion of the Holocaust. All of this figures prominently in the greater discussion of *Die Meistersinger*, for, ironically, whereas anti-Semitism was not a particular issue for audiences during World War II, it is precisely the anti-Semitism of World War II that causes such consternation with this work today. Moreover, the anti-Semitism has now been (erroneously) conjoined with the German nationalism, and they are both part and parcel of present-day reception of this work. As stated by Richard Taruskin in the essay, "The Problem Revisited," from his 2009 *Music in the Nineteenth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music*:

And that is how an art conceived in politics and dedicated to social utopia has been resolutely depoliticized and desocialized even as (in the opinion of many) it has

⁹ The arguments of these scholars should not to be conflated with the dubious scholarship of writers such as Joachim Köhler and Christopher Nicholson (see the Introduction), whose books, while espousing a seemingly preternatural belief in Wagner's anti-Semitism, pitch Hitler as part of some inevitable continuum stemming from Wagner. Works of this ilk have been summarily dismissed by both sides of the Wagner argument.

continued to have a momentous political and social influence in the sometimes horrible history of the twentieth century.¹⁰

Today that association has gone far beyond the bounds of academic discussion and entered the realm of at least the opera-going part of the American popular consciousness. Will it ever be possible for us to view this opera without considering it against the prism of the Third Reich? Because of its nationalism and anti-Semitism (at least tacitly confirmed by the Met's cancellation), *Die Meistersinger* is now known to much of the American public as the opera of the Nazis. Only with productions that directly engage and explore this dark side of the opera in tandem with thoughtful discussion of it will this perception of *Die Meistersinger* change.

The ramifications of the Met's decision to ban this opera twice during the World Wars are profound; for by cancelling *Die Meistersinger*, they tacitly confirmed all the political baggage that is suspected and inferred in the piece. Should the Metropolitan Opera be held to a higher standard? I believe that it should be. *Die Meistersinger* is, at its heart, a drama revolving around the merits of art versus the pull of politics. It is about art continuing in an adverse environment. And how does Wagner's all-important concept of *gesamtkunstwerk* play into the evolving interpretations of *Die Meistersinger*? Would Wagner "blow a fuse," as suggested by the previously cited *Newsweek* article, if he could fathom how his works have come to be known? Wagner's works, much like Shakespeare's, lend themselves to an ever-evolving interpretation. *Die Meistersinger* in particular provides a fantastic crucible that allows for multivalent meanings. The very idea of "German Masters" is rife with subtext that can be interpreted in a myriad of ways

¹⁰ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, in vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford University Press, 2010): 562.

depending upon the audience and their framework. With this ever-important (yet controversial) phrase, we can safely assume that Wagner had Bach, Beethoven, and Goethe in mind as the “Masters”. During the twentieth century, however, this text takes on a different meaning. Suddenly “German Masters” takes on a sinister tone owing to those who misappropriated the work. In the twentieth century, the ideas of art espoused in *Die Meistersinger* became lost in the historical events that occurred long after the work’s completion. And those who were charged with protecting these ideas became entangled in their own politics. Despite all of Edward Johnson’s speeches to the contrary, one wonders if he understood this irony. It is the ultimate paradox that an opera most concerned about art itself could not be allowed to rise above external pressures and now exists in the minds of many as mere propaganda. One wonders how the American reception and perception of the work would differ today had the Met chosen art rather than bowing to politics.

APPENDIX:

**PRODUCTIONS OF *DIE MEISTERSINGER*
AT THE MET, 1885/1886 - 1949/1950:
AN INVENTORY**

What follows is an inventory of all Metropolitan Opera productions of *Die Meistersinger* from its premiere season through the 1949/1950 season. I end with 1950 on the grounds that it is the final season of Edward Johnson's tenure. The inventory is organized chronologically, on a season-by-season basis. Each entry includes the precise dates of all performances within each season, as well as a running tally of cumulative number of performances. The inventory is based on <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm> and is organized chronologically, on a season-by season basis..

For each season I list the singers who took the six main roles: Hans Sachs, Eva, Walter von Stolzing, Beckmesser, Magdalene, and David, as well as the conductor and members of the production team (set designer and director). If during a given season more than one singer took a role, I identify all concerned, though I do not align individual singers with precise dates.

A "D" indicates that a singer was making his or her debut in the role; an "F" indicates a singer's final performance or final season.

Many of the entries end with brief comments; these are rather "grab bag"- like in nature, and simply flesh out a season or an individual performance with an interesting tidbit of information.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1885/1886	January 4, 8, 11, 16, 29, February 3, 6, 22 1-8	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David Conductor Set Designer	Emil Fischer Albert Stritt Felix Krämer Anton Seidl Henry E. Hoyt	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser Director	Auguste Seidl-Kraus Marianne Brandt Otto Kemnitz (D) Mr. Van Hell

Comments: 4 January was the United States premiere; used members of local Liederkrantz societies for the chorus; Director's first name not listed.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1886/1887	January 21, 28, February 2, 5, 25	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David	Emil Fischer Max Alvery Felix Krämer, Otto Kemnitz	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Auguste Seidl-Kraus Marianne Brandt Wilhelm Basch
	9-13				
		Conductor	Anton Seidl		
		Set Designer	Henry E. Hoyt	Director	Mr. Van Hell
<i>Comments: Act III on 25 February was interrupted after the quintet for a brief ceremony honoring Anton Seidl.</i>					
1887/1888	November 4	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David	Emil Fischer Max Alvery José Ferenczy (D)	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Auguste Seidl-Kraus Marianne Brandt Otto Kemnitz
	14				
		Conductor	Anton Seidl		
		Set Designer	Henry E. Hoyt	Director	Theodore Habelmann

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1888/1889	January 11, 14, 19, 23, March 1, 25, 30, April 8, 13, 26, May 1, 4, 10, 17 15-28	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David Conductor Set Designer	Emil Fischer Max Alvery Wilhelm Sedlmayer Anton Seidl Henry E. Hoyt	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser Director	Katherine Senger-Bettaque Hedwig Reil Ludwig Mödlinger Theodore Habelmann

Comments: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 25 and 30 March; Boston Theatre, Boston, 8 and 13 April; Chicago Opera House, Chicago, 26 April, 1 and 4 May; Grand Music Hall, St. Louis, 10 May; Amphion Academy, Brooklyn, 17 May.

1889/1890	March 7, 8, 21 April 11, 17, 23 29-34	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David Conductor Set Designer	Theodore Reichmann, Emil Fischer Paul Kalisch Nicolai Gorski (D) Anton Seidl, Walter Damrosch Henry E. Hoyt	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser Director	Félicie Kaschowska Charlotte Huhn Joseph Arden Theodore Habelmann
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Comments: Smaller market tour: Boston Theatre, Boston, 11 and 17 April; The Auditorium, Chicago, 23 April.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1890/1891	January 14, 16, 19, 24 February 23, March 21	Hans Sachs	Theodore Reichmann, Emil Fischer (F)	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Marie Jahn (F) Charlotte Huhn (F) Otto Kemnitz (F)
		Walther von Stolzing	Jean de Reszke, Andreas Dippel		
		David	Adolph Von Hübner		
	35-40	Conductor	Anton Seidl		
		Set Designer	Henry E. Hoyt	Director	Theodore Habelmann
1891/1892	March 2, 5, 7, 21	Hans Sachs	Jean Lassalle	Eva	Emma Albani
		Walther von Stolzing	Jean de Reszke	Magdalene	Mathilde Bauermeister
	41-44	David	Sebastian Montariol	Beckmesser	Agostino Carbone
		Conductor	Anton Seidl		
		Set Designer	Henry E. Hoyt	Director	Theodore Habelmann

Comments: All performances in Italian as I Maestri Cantori (translator not specified); smaller market tour: Mechanics Building Auditorium, Boston, 21 March.

1892/1893

Comments: No performances during this season.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1893/1894	January 8, 17	Hans Sachs	Jean Lassalle	Eva	Emma Eames
		Walther von Stolzing	Jean de Reszke	Magdalene	Mathilde Bauermeister
	45-46	David	Georges Mauguière	Beckmesser	Agostino Carbone
		Conductor	Luigi Mancinelli		
		Set Designer	Not Listed	Director	Armand Castelmarty
<i>Comments: New production, but designer not listed; performed in Italian as I Maestri Cantori (translator not specified).</i>					
1894/1895	April 4, 22	Hans Sachs	Edouard de Reszke	Eva	Emma Eames
		Walther von Stolzing	Jean de Reszke	Magdalene	Mathilde Bauermeister
	47-48	David	Lloyd D'Aubigné	Beckmesser	Agostino Carbone
		Conductor	Luigi Mancinelli		
		Set Designer	Not Listed	Director	William Parry (D)
<i>Comments: In Italian as I Maestri Cantori (translator not specified); smaller market tour: Music Hall, St. Louis, 4 April.</i>					
1895/1896	February 10	Hans Sachs	Edouard de Reszke	Eva	Lola Beeth
		Walther von Stolzing	Jean de Reszke	Magdalene	Mathilde Bauermeister
	49	David	Lloyd D'Aubigné	Beckmesser	Agostino Carbone
		Conductor	Anton Seidl		
		Set Designer	Not Listed	Director	William Parry

Comments: In Italian as I Maestri Cantori (translator not specified).

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1896/1897	November 18, 30, December 26 50-52	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David Conductor Set Designer	Edouard de Reszke Jean de Reszke Lloyd D'Aubigné Luigi Mancinelli Not Listed	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser Director	Emma Eames Mathilde Bauermeister David Bispham (D) William Parry

Comments: In Italian as I Maestri Cantori (translator not specified).

1897/1898

Comments: No performances during this season.

1898/1899

Comments: Excerpts only as part of a Gala Concert, 23 March, or Concert Series, 18 December, 5 and 26 February, 19 March, and 9 April.

1899/1900	January 24, 30, February 2, 17, March 19 53-57	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David Conductor Set Designer	Anton Van Rooy, Theodore Bertram Andreas Dippel Hans Breuer, Jacques Bars Emil Paur Not Listed	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser Director	Emma Eames, Johanna Gadski, Marcella Sembrich Ernestine Schumann-Heink Fritz Friedrichs (D) Pierre Baudu
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Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
Comments: Once again in German; smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 19 March.					
1900/1901	February 20, March 7, 25 April 13, 18	Hans Sachs	Theodore Bertram, Edouard de Reszke	Eva	Johanna Gadski, Fritzi Scheff
		Walther von Stolzing	Andreas Dippel, Jean de Reszke	Magdalene	Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Rosa Olitzka
	58-62	David	Adolph Von Hübbenet	Beckmesser	David Bispham
		Conductor	Walter Damrosch		
		Set Designer	Not Listed	Director	Paul Schumann
Comments: Smaller market tour: Boston, 13 April; Pittsburgh, 18 April.					
1901/1902	November 21, 28, December 18, 21, January 9, 24	Hans Sachs	Edouard de Reszke	Eva	Johanna Gadski, Luise Reuss-Belce
		Walther von Stolzing	Andreas Dippel	Magdalene	Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Marie Maurer (D)
		David	Albert Reiss		David Bispham
	63-68	Conductor	Walter Damrosch	Beckmesser	
		Set Designer	Not Listed	Director	Not Listed
Comments: Smaller market tour: Grand Opera House, San Francisco, 21 and 28 November; Music Hall, Cincinnati, 18 December; Cleveland, 21 December; Philadelphia, 9 January.					

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1902/1903	February 20,	Hans Sachs	Anton Van Rooy	Eva	Johanna Gadske
	March 17, 21, 25,	Walther von Stolzing	Georg Anthes,	Magdalene	Marie Maurer,
	April 9, 25		Alois Burgstaller		Ernestine Schumann-Heink
	69-74	David	Albert Reiss	Beckmesser	David Bispham
		Conductor	Alfred Hertz		
		Set Designer	Not Listed	Director	Johannes Elmblad

Comments: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 17 March; Boston Theatre, Boston, 25 March; The Auditorium, Chicago, 9 April; Pittsburgh, 25 April.

1903/1904

Comments: Excerpts only as part of Concert Series, 29 November, 17 January, 21 February, and 6 March.

1904/1905	December 3, 14, 30,	Hans Sachs	Anton Van Rooy	Eva	Aino Ackté,
	January 9, 25, 31	Walther von Stolzing	Heinrich Knote (D),		Bella Alten
	February 4,		Alois Burgstaller,	Magdalene	Louise Homer,
	March 2, 11, 15, 25,		Andreas Dippel		Josephine Jacoby
	April 15	David	Albert Reiss	Beckmesser	Otto Goritz,
	75-86	Conductor	Alfred Hertz		Emil Greder
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers	Director	Anton Fuchs

Comments: New production; smaller market tour: Philadelphia, 31 January; Boston, 11 March; Pittsburgh, 15 March; Chicago, 25 March; Grand Opera House, San Francisco, 15 April.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1905/1906	February 2, 10, 19, March 10	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing	Anton Van Rooy Heinrich Knote, Alois Burgstaller Albert Reiss	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Bella Alten, Paula Ralph Louise Homer, Josephine Jacoby Otto Goritz
	87-90	David	Alfred Hertz		
		Conductor			
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers	Director	Jacques Goldberg

1906/1907

Comments: Excerpts only as part of Gala Concerts, 6 January and 15 March.

1907/1908	November 23, 30, December 10, 27, January 15	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David	Anton Van Rooy Heinrich Knote Albert Reiss	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Johanna Gadske Marie Mattfeld Otto Goritz
	91-95	Conductor	Alfred Hertz		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers	Director	Anton Schertel

Comments: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 10 December.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1908/1909	January 22, 27, February 2, 17, 27, March 23, April 1, 13	Hans Sachs	Fritz Feinhals (F), Walter Soomer	Eva	Emmy Destinn, Johanna Gadski
		Walther von Stolzing	Carl Jörn (D)	Magdalene	Louise Homer
		David	Albert Reiss	Beckmesser	Otto Goritz
	96-103	Conductor	Alfred Hertz		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers	Director	Anton Schertel

Comments: First uncut performance, 23 March; smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 2 February; Academy of Music, Brooklyn, 17 February; Chicago, 13 April.

1909/1910	March 26, 30 April 2, 18	Hans Sachs	Walter Soomer	Eva	Johanna Gadski
		Walther von Stolzing	Leo Slezak, Carl Jörn	Magdalene	Florence Wickham
	104-107	David	Albert Reiss	Beckmesser	Otto Goritz (F)
		Conductor	Arturo Toscanini		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Anton Schertel

Comments: New Production; smaller market tour: Boston Opera House, Boston, 2 April.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1910/1911	January 10, 28, February 25, March 6, 15	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing	Walter Soomer Carl Jörn, Leo Slezak Albert Reiss	Eva	Emmy Destinn, Bella Alten, Johanna Gadski
	108-112	David		Magdalene Beckmesser	Florence Wickham Otto Goritz
		Conductor	Arturo Toscanini		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Anton Schertel
1911/1912	March 6, 25, April 11	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing	Hermann Weil Carl Jörn, Leo Slezak Albert Reiss	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Emmy Destinn Florence Wickham Otto Goritz
	113-115	David			
		Conductor	Arturo Toscanini		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Anton Schertel

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1912/1913	December 6, 10, January 20, February 4, 13, 22, April 9	Hans Sachs	Hermann Weil, Willy Buers (D)	Eva	Emmy Destinn, Johanna Gadschi, Bella Alten
		Walther von Stolzing	Carl Jörn, Leo Slezak, Jacques Urlus	Magdalene	Louise Homer, Marie Mattfeld
	116-122	David	Albert Reiss	Beckmesser	Otto Goritz
		Conductor	Alfred Hertz		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Anton Schertel
<i>Comments: 20 January: Act III, Scene 1, omitted owing to Hermann Weil's indisposition; Weil had to speak the lines for Scene 2; smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Brooklyn, 4 February.</i>					
1913/1914	January 15, 31, February 9, March 27	Hans Sachs	Hermann Weil	Eva	Johanna Gadschi, Emmy Destinn, Frieda Hempel
		Walther von Stolzing	Jacques Urlus, Carl Jörn, Rudolf Berger	Magdalene	Marie Mattfeld, Louise Homer
	123-126	David	Albert Reiss	Beckmesser	Otto Goritz
		Conductor	Arturo Toscanini		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Franz Hörth

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1914/1915	March 12, 22, April 7	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David	Hermann Weil Johannes Sembach Albert Reiss	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Frieda Hempel Marie Mattfeld Otto Goritz
	127-129	Conductor	Arturo Toscanini		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Loomis Taylor
1915/1916	January 7, 22, February 7, 15, March 11, 28, April 22, 29	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David	Hermann Weil Johannes Sembach, Jacques Urlus Albert Reiss	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Frieda Hempel. Johanna Gadski Marie Mattfeld Otto Goritz
	130-137	Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Jan Heythekker

Comments: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Brooklyn, 15 February; Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 28 March; Boston Opera House, Boston, 22 April; Auditorium, Atlanta, 29 April.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1916/1917	January 17,	Hans Sachs	Hermann Weil,	Eva	Frieda Hempel,
	February 9,		Clarence Whitehill		Johanna Gadske
	March 1, 19,	Walther von Stolzing	Johannes Sembach,	Magdalene	Kathleen Howard,
	April 7		Jacques Urlus		Marie Mattfeld
	138-142	David	Albert Reiss	Beckmesser	Otto Goritz
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Kautsky & Rottonara Brothers, Burghart & Co. designed sets for Acts II and III.	Director	Jan Heythekker

1917/1918

Comments: All Wagner operas banned for the remainder of World War I.

1918/1919

Comments: See 1918/1919.

1919/1920

Comments: Although Wagner was gradually reintroduced to the repertory after World War I, Die Meistersinger was not performed until 1923/1924.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1920/1921					
<i>Comments: See 1919/1920.</i>					
1921/1922					
<i>Comments: See 1919/1920.</i>					
1922/1923					
<i>Comments: See 1919/1920.</i>					
1923/1924	November 9, 19, December 5, 11, February 23, March 27, April 12 143-149	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David Conductor Set Designer	Clarence Whitehill, Friedrich Schorr, Michael Bohnen Rudolf Laubenthal (D), Curt Taucher George Meader Artur Bodanzky Hans Kautsky	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser Director	Florence Easton, Elisabeth Rethberg, Delia Reinhardt Kathleen Howard, Marion Telve Gustav Schützendorf Wilhelm von Wymetal

Comments: New production.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1924/1925	November 15	Hans Sachs	Paul Bender,	Eva	Elisabeth Rethberg,
	December 1, 24, 30		Clarence Whitehill,		Marcella Röseler,
	February 27,		Friedrich Schorr,		Maria Müller
	March 26, 31		Michael Bohnen	Magdalene	Marion Telva,
	150-156	Walther von Stolzing	Rudolf Laubenthal,		Kathleen Howard,
		David	Curt Taucher	Beckmesser	Henriette Wakefield
			George Meader		Gustav Schützendorf
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm von Wymetal

Comments: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Brooklyn, 30 December; Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 31 March.

1925/1926	November 28,	Hans Sachs	Clarence Whitehill,	Eva	Elisabeth Rethberg,
	December 9, 19,		Friedrich Schorr,		Marcella Röseler,
	March 11, 16		Michael Bohnen		Florence Easton,
	April 9	Walther von Stolzing	Rudolf Laubenthal,	Magdalene	Maria Müller
	157-162	David	Curt Taucher	Beckmesser	Marion Telva
			George Meader		Gustav Schützendorf,
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		Arnold Gabor
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm von Wymetal

Comments: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 16 March.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1926/1927	November 3, 13, December 16, January 3, March 30, April 8	Hans Sachs	Clarence Whitehill, Friedrich Schorr, Michael Bohnen	Eva	Florence Easton, Elisabeth Rethberg, Maria Müller
		Walther von Stolzing	Rudolf Laubenthal, Curt Taucher, Walter Kirchhoff	Magdalene	Marion Telva, Kathleen Howard
	163-168	David	George Meader	Beckmesser	Gustav Schützendorf
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm von Wymetal
1927/1928	November 2, 8, 25, January 7, 10, March 8, 22, April 20,	Hans Sachs	Clarence Whitehill, Michael Bohnen, Friedrich Schorr	Eva	Grete Stückgold (D), Dorothee Manski, Elisabeth Rethberg, Maria Müller,
		Walther von Stolzing	Rudolf Laubenthal, Walter Kirchhoff		Florence Easton
	169-176	David	George Meader	Magdalene	Kathleen Howard, Marion Telva,
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky, Giuseppe Bamboschek	Beckmesser	Henriette Wakefield Gustav Schützendorf
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm von Wymetal

Comment: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Brooklyn, 8 November; Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 10 January; Lyric Theater, Baltimore, 20 April.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1928/1929	November 12, December 12, 22, March 22, 27	Hans Sachs	Clarence Whitehill, Michael Bohnen	Eva	Elisabeth Rethberg, Florence Easton, Grete Stückgold
		Walther von Stolzing	Rudolf Laubenthal, Walter Kirchhoff	Magdalene	Marion Telva, Henriette Wakefield
	177-181	David	George Meader	Beckmesser	Gustav Schützendorf
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm von Wymetal
1929/1930	October 30, November 14, December 17 January 3	Hans Sachs	Clarence Whitehill, Friedrich Schorr	Eva	Grete Stückgold, Editha Fleischer, Elisabeth Rethberg, Maria Müller
	February 7, 22, April 5	Walther von Stolzing	Rudolf Laubenthal, Walter Kirchhoff	Magdalene	Henriette Wakefield, Marion Telva
		David	George Meader, Marek Windheim	Beckmesser	Gustav Schützendorf
	182-188	Conductor	Joseph Rosenstock (D), Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm von Wymetal

Comment: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 17 December.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1930/1931	November 24, December 3, February 12, March 7, April 8	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr, Clarence Whitehill, Michael Bohnen	Eva	Maria Müller, Elisabeth Rethberg, Editha Fleischer
		Walther von Stolzing	Walter Kirchhoff, Rudolf Laubenthal	Magdalene	Marion Telva, Henriette Wakefield,
		David	George Meader		Karin Branzell
	189-193			Beckmesser	Gustav Schützendorf
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm von Wymetal
1931/1932	November 12, 30, December 12	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr	Eva	Editha Fleischer,
		Walther von Stolzing	Max Lorenz (D), Rudolf Laubenthal	Magdalene	Maria Müller
		David	Hans Clemens		Marie Von Essen (D), Karin Branzell
	194-196			Beckmesser	Gustav Schützendorf
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard

1932/1933

Comment: Excerpts only as part of Gala Concerts, 27 November and 11 December, or Concert Series, 31 December, 7 January, and 14 January.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1933/1934	January 18, 26	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr,	Eva	Elisabeth Rethberg,
	February 7, 26,		Ludwig Hofmann		Maria Müller,
	March 13, 15	Walther von Stolzing	Max Lorenz		Editha Fleischer,
		David	Hans Clemens		Lotte Lehmann
	197-202	Conductor	Artur Bodanzky	Magdalene	Doris Doe,
				Beckmesser	Henriette Wakefield
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Gustav Schützendorf
					Wilhelm Von Wymetal Jr.
<i>Comment: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 13 March.</i>					
1934/1935	February 4,	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr,	Eva	Maria Müller,
	March 1, 14, 30		Ludwig Hofmann		Lotte Lehmann,
	April 5	Walther von Stolzing	Paul Althouse		Editha Fleischer
		David	Hans Clemens,	Magdalene	Doris Doe,
	203-207		Marek Windheim		Karin Branzell
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky	Beckmesser	Gustav Schützendorf
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Wilhelm Von Wymetal Jr.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1935/1936	February 3, 22	Hans Sachs	Ludwig Hofmann	Eva	Elisabeth Rethberg,
	March 5, 11,	Walther von Stolzing	René Maison (D)		Editha Fleischer
	208-211	David	Hans Clemens	Magdalene	Karin Branzell,
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky, Karl Riedel	Beckmesser	Doris Doe Eduard Habich
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Leopold Sachse
<i>Comment: George Balanchine choreographed this season's performances.</i>					
1936/1937	February 12,	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr	Eva	Lotte Lehmann,
	March 12, 30	Walther von Stolzing	Charles Kullman, René Maison	Magdalene	Elisabeth Rethberg
	212-214	David	Karl Laufkötter	Beckmesser	Karin Branzell, Doris Doe
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		Eduard Habich
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Leopold Sachse
1937/1938	January 14	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr	Eva	Elisabeth Rethberg,
	February 11,	Walther von Stolzing	René Maison, Charles Kullman	Magdalene	Irene Jessner
	March 9	David	Karl Laufkötter	Beckmesser	Kerstin Thorborg, Karin Branzell
	215-217	Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		Adolf Vogel
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Leopold Sachse

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1938/1939	February 7, 27,	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr	Eva	Elisabeth Rethberg
	March 23	Walther von Stolzing	Charles Kullman,	Magdalene	Karin Branzell,
	May 4		René Maison		Kerstin Thorborg
	218-221	David	Erich Witte	Beckmesser	Arnold Gabor
		Conductor	Artur Bodanzky		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Leopold Sachse

Comment: 4 May marked the opening of the New York World's Fair Metropolitan Opera Season; smaller market tour: Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall, Hartford, 7 February; Boston Opera House, Boston, 23 March.

1939/1940	December 2, 8, 23,	Hans Sachs	Friedrich Schorr,	Eva	Irene Jessner,
	January 9, 17,		Herbert Janssen		Elisabeth Rethberg
	February 28,	Walther von Stolzing	Charles Kullman,	Magdalene	Karin Branzell,
	222-227	David	René Maison		Kerstin Thorborg
			Karl Laufkötter,	Beckmesser	Walter Olitzki (D)
		Conductor	Anthony Marlowe		
			Erich Leinsdorf		
		Set Designer	Hans Kautsky	Director	Leopold Sachse

Comment: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 9 January.

1940/1941

Comment: Die Meistersinger shelved until 1945 owing to World War II.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production
1941/1942		
<i>Comment: See 1940/1941.</i>		
1942/1943		
<i>Comment: See 1940/1941.</i>		
1943/1944		
<i>Comment: See 1940/1941.</i>		

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1944/1945	January 12, 30	Hans Sachs	Herbert Janssen,	Eva	Eleanor Steber
	February 10, 26		Frederic Gynrod	Magdalene	Kerstin Thorborg
	March 22,	Walther von Stolzing	Charles Kullman,	Beckmesser	Gerhard Pechner
	April 13, 17,		Kurt Baum		
	Mary 4	David	John Garris,		
	228-235		Karl Laufkötter		
		Conductor	George Szell, Paul Breisach		
		Set Designer	Julius Dove (D), Hans Kautsky	Director	Herbert Graf

Comment: First performances after hiatus of four seasons; sets for Acts I and III borrowed from Chicago Grand Opera Association; smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 30 January; Boston Opera House, Boston, 13 April; Chicago Opera House, Chicago, 4 May.

1945/1946	December 6, 15,	Hans Sachs	Herbert Janssen,	Eva	Eleanor Steber
	January 9,		Frederic Gynrod (F),	Magdalene	Kerstin Thorborg
	February 9		Joel Berglund (D)	Beckmesser	Gerhard Pechner
	March 8, 26,	Walther von Stolzing	Charles Kullman,		
	April 9	David	Torsten Ralf		
	236-242		John Garris,		
			Karl Laufkötter		
		Conductor	George Szell, Paul Breisach		
		Set Designer	Julius Dove, Hans Kautsky	Director	Herbert Graf

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
Comment: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 26 March; Boston Opera House, Boston, 9 April.					
1946/1947	February 1, 17, 26, 243-245	Hans Sachs	Herbert Janssen, Joel Berglund	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Astrid Varnay Margaret Harshaw
		Walther von Stolzing	Set Svanholm, Torsten Ralf		Gerhard Pechner
		David	John Garris		
		Conductor	Fritz Busch		
		Set Designer	Julius Dove, Hans Kautsky	Director	Herbert Graf
1947/1948	November 21, 25, 29, December 13, January 15, March 8, May 11 246-252	Hans Sachs	Herbert Janssen, Joel Berglund	Eva	Polyna Stoska, Astrid Varnay,
		Walther von Stolzing	Torsten Ralf (F), Set Svanholm,	Magdalene	Irene Jessner
		David	Charles Kullman John Garris	Beckmesser	Margaret Harshaw, Martha Lipton
		Conductor	Wolfgang Martin, Fritz Busch		Gerhard Pechner
		Set Designer	Julius Dove, Hans Kautsky	Director	Wolfgang Martin

Comment: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 25 November; Public Auditorium, Cleveland, 11 May.

Season	Dates / Performance Number	Cast / Production			
1948/1949					
<i>Comment: No performances during this season.</i>					
1949/1950	January 12, 20, 31, February 8, 27, April 20 May 5, 11 253-260	Hans Sachs Walther von Stolzing David	Ferdinand Frantz, Herbert Janssen, Paul Schöffler Set Svanholm, Charles Kullman Peter Klein, Karl Laufkötter (F)	Eva Magdalene Beckmesser	Astrid Varnay, Polyna Stoska (F) Margaret Harshaw, Hertha Glaz, Kerstin Thorborg (F) Gerhard Pechner
		Conductor	Fritz Reiner		
		Set Designer	Julius Dove, Hans Kautsky	Director	Herbert Graf

Comment: Smaller market tour: Academy of Music, Philadelphia, 31 January; Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, 20 April; Northrup Memorial Auditorium, Minneapolis, 5 May.

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