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The Struggle for Orchestral Control: Power, Dialogue, and the Role of the Orchestra in Wagner's *Ring*

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Defining the precise role of the orchestra in Wagner's mature operas is, quite simply, impossible. This statement should be unsurprising to most opera scholars; after all, defining the role of the orchestra in *any* opera is an immense, if not insurmountable, challenge. To begin with, the orchestra in almost all operas is not generally understood to have *a* role, but *multiple* roles. In fact, the word "role" is itself questionable; contemporary scholarship speaks more frequently of voices, agents, protagonists, and personae.[1] And none of these "voices" tend to be isolated. On the contrary, they frequently interpenetrate, overlap, collide, and even synthesize.

In Wagner, and especially in the *Ring,* the role of the orchestra is highly complex. Yet in the wake of Wagner's famous comparisons between the modern orchestra and the Greek chorus in Attic tragedy—comparisons considerably amplified by Nietzsche—there is a tradition of viewing the orchestra in the *Ring* in relatively restricted terms, as a detached and independent observer, an entity that comments on and reacts to the events onstage but without making direct connections and interventions.[2] In

[1]See especially Edward Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974) as well as his later work, including "Poet's Love or Composer's Love?" in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries,* ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 177–92, and "The World of Opera and Its Inhabitants," in *Music: A View from Delft,* ed. Robert P. Morgan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 125–38. See also Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[2]Dieter Borchmeyer points out that Lessing anticipated Wagner by comparing the orchestra with "ancient choruses." See *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre,* trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 160. Wagner himself makes the comparison in a variety of letters and essays, especially *Opera and Drama* and *Zukunfstmusik*. For a general overview of Wagner's stance, see Borchmeyer, pp. 160–77.

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this article, I consider an alternative: situations in which characters are understood to exert direct control over the orchestra. Such situations are inherently dramatic, especially in the many dialogues of the *Ring* where one character attempts to impose his or her will on another. In such cases, the characters actually vie for orchestral control, and their manipulation of the orchestra takes on a distinctly rhetorical function. Put simply, it becomes a tool for power and persuasion.[3]

This interpretive stance has its roots in the seminal work of Edward Cone, whose 1974 book *The Composer's Voice* established a basic set of questions that might be asked about who and what are speaking in music (and *through* music). Cone established the possibility that multiple personae may be interacting at once in the worlds of opera and song, including a verbal, a vocal, and an instrumental persona, all of which would fall under the broader persona of the composer.[4] Cone refined and in some cases altered these positions in later articles on the subject. In "The World of Opera and Its Inhabitants" from 1988, he imagines opera as an alternate universe in which characters essentially live in a world of music, often "composing" their own songs. With regard to Bizet's *Carmen,* he writes: "What Carmen knows is what all operatic characters must know, although not always so patently: that they live in a world of music, and that they express themselves and communicate with one another in song."[5] Cone amplified this position in an even later essay from 1992. Regarding Schubert's Lieder, he argues that characters in song not only compose their own melodies, but their accompaniments as well. In *Der Leiermann,* he writes: "The sound as heard by the musician-protagonist is his raw material; what we hear is his utilization of that sound as an element of his accompaniment."[6] This position, as Cone acknowledges, is a sharp break from his earlier positions in *The Composer's Voice:*

> When the accompaniment proceeds directly from the imagination of the protagonist, a separate instrumental persona becomes superfluous…my three original figures [the three personae identified in *The Composer's Voice*] have collapsed into one: a unitary vocal-instrumental protagonist that is coextensive with the persona of the actual composer of the song.[7]

This later perspective is quite suggestive with regard to opera, but it raises some immediate questions. If operatic characters compose their own accompaniments, what happens when multiple characters sing at once, or even in turn? David Rosen, for instance, wonders: "Is Rigoletto or Sparafucile—or both—the composer of the orchestral music of their dialogue in act I of *Rigoletto*? Who composed the orchestral music of the quartet in *Rigoletto*? Of the quartet in act I of *Fidelio*? And what of the music played to an empty stage?"[8] These questions complicate Cone's perspective, and in general they point to the broader difficulty of defining a single role for the orchestra in any operatic context. But Cone's ideas are quite attractive nonetheless. After all, there *are* situations when characters seem, in some sense, to compose their own accompaniments. And, as I will argue below, adopting this perspective has the potential to enhance our experience of crucial dramatic moments, in Wagner and elsewhere.

The "Fully Diegetic" Perspective

Before introducing a specific mode of interpretation it is first necessary to present a more general picture of the orchestra that might reconcile some of Cone's views with other alternatives. As previously mentioned, Cone argues

[3]Wagner himself offered a number of metaphors for understanding the orchestra. In addition to the comparison with Greek Attic tragedy, he also described the orchestra as an ocean upon which floats the verse-melody. See, for instance, *Oper und Drama* in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* (2nd edn. Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsch, 1888), IV, 171–72. I do not intend, however, to make a historical argument here; thus Wagner's own views of the orchestra will not be discussed in any detail.
[4]Cone, *The Composer's Voice,* p. 23.
[5]Cone, "The World of Opera," p. 132.
[6]Cone, "Poet's Love or Composer's Love?," p. 181.
[7]Ibid., p. 182.
[8]David Rosen, "Cone's and Kivy's 'World of Opera'," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4/1 (1992), 61–74, at 71.

that we might hear the accompaniment of song—and by extension, operatic songs—as composed by the song's principal character (the "vocal-instrumental protagonist"). Peter Kivy, who generally sympathizes with Cone, offers an alternative: the idea that the orchestra, in most cases, is best heard as a representation of the physical gestures of the characters.[9] He presents this in conjunction with Cone's suggestion that the characters compose their own accompaniment: "A wise Providence has substituted musical 'gesture' for physical gesture in the world of opera in the form of the expressive opera orchestra. And since it is the gesture of the 'speaker,' of course he or she has 'composed' it, and of course can be heard by all in its presence, just as the gestures of the speakers in our world are seen (under the proper conditions) by all."[10] Rosen finds this perspective objectionable, especially if adopted wholeheartedly. In particular, he mentions the difficulty of testing it "against a rival, more intuitive hypothesis, that [the accompanying orchestra] reflects an emotional state, rather than the gestures that might be made by a person in that state."[11] This alternative represents a commonly held view. It also forms a perspective that does not necessarily coordinate well with Cone's or Kivy's. But isn't it possible that the orchestra can be heard to do all of these things and more? And if so, how would we define this kind of interpretive framework? Could we imagine a single, broad view of the orchestra that would accommodate all of these perspectives?

To get a better sense of the problem at hand, consider ex. 1, a passage from the famous *Waldweben* scene of *Siegfried,* act II, sc. 2. This is a complex passage and requires some extended discussion. On one level, we might hear the orchestra in this example as a representation of nature: the wavering sixteenth notes of the muted strings—usually identified as the "forest murmurs"—express Siegfried's immediate surroundings, the rustling leaves and branches.[12] The clarinet melody that begins in m. 6 of the example, however, is clearly something different. We have heard this melody before. And, perhaps more importantly, Siegfried himself seems to have heard it before. The theme first appears in *Die Walküre,* act I, sc. 1 (15/1/3 of the Schirmer vocal score)[13] as a "bond of sympathy" between Siegfried's parents, Siegmund and Sieglinde.[14] But Siegfried himself *may* have heard it earlier in his own opera: act I, sc. 1, of *Siegfried*. In that scene, after considerable threats to Mime, Siegfried forces the dwarf to tell him about his mother, and as he does so, we hear a distorted version of the theme in the orchestra (given in ex. 2).[15] Mime himself never

[9]Kivy doesn't claim that this is always the case. He only considers it valid when the orchestra conveys an "expressive function." It is unclear, though, how he distinguishes the expressive function from other functions. See "Opera Talk: A Philosophical 'Phantasie'," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3/1 (1991), 63–77, at 73.

[10]Kivy, "Opera Talk," pp. 75–76. For more recent work on music and gesture in opera, see Mary Ann Smart's *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), which offers a brilliant, historically sensitive account of the issue. Smart shows that pantomimic moments—where physical gestures correspond quite closely to musical events—gradually give way in the nineteenth century to a metaphysical ideal, where gesture is sublimated to a more transcendent "inner" expression. As she demonstrates, however, pantomime is never entirely eliminated, and the different modes of expression often interact in fascinating ways, with the orchestral music often linked to bodily movement, or "the body" in general.

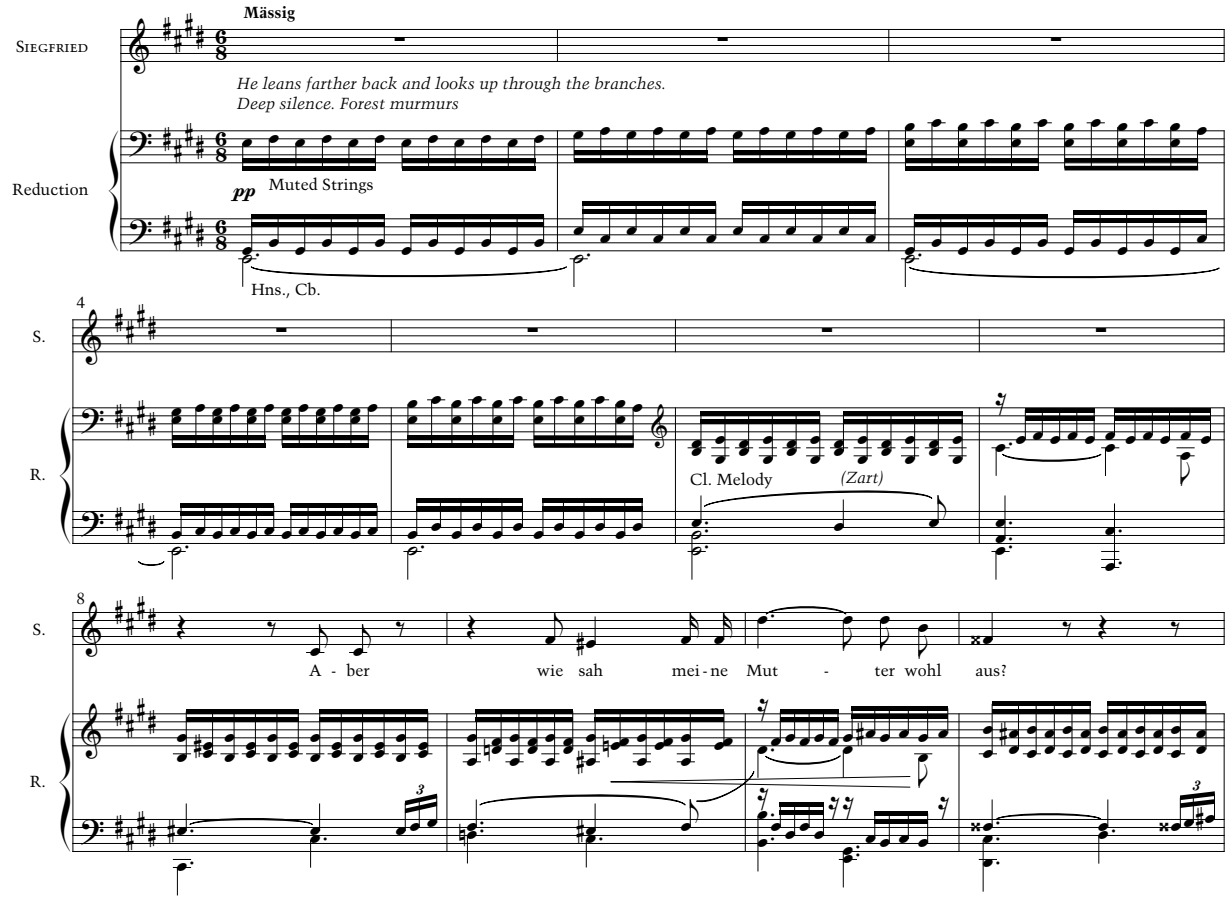
[11]Rosen, "Cone's and Kivy's 'World of Opera'," p. 73. Rosen's objections to Kivy are somewhat misguided, however, as demonstrated by Kivy's response: "Composers and 'Composers': A Response to David Rosen," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4/2 (1992), 179–86.

[12]Musical representations of nature are quite common in the *Ring*. Obvious examples include the storm at the beginning of *Die Walküre* and the rushing water at the outset of *Das Rheingold*.

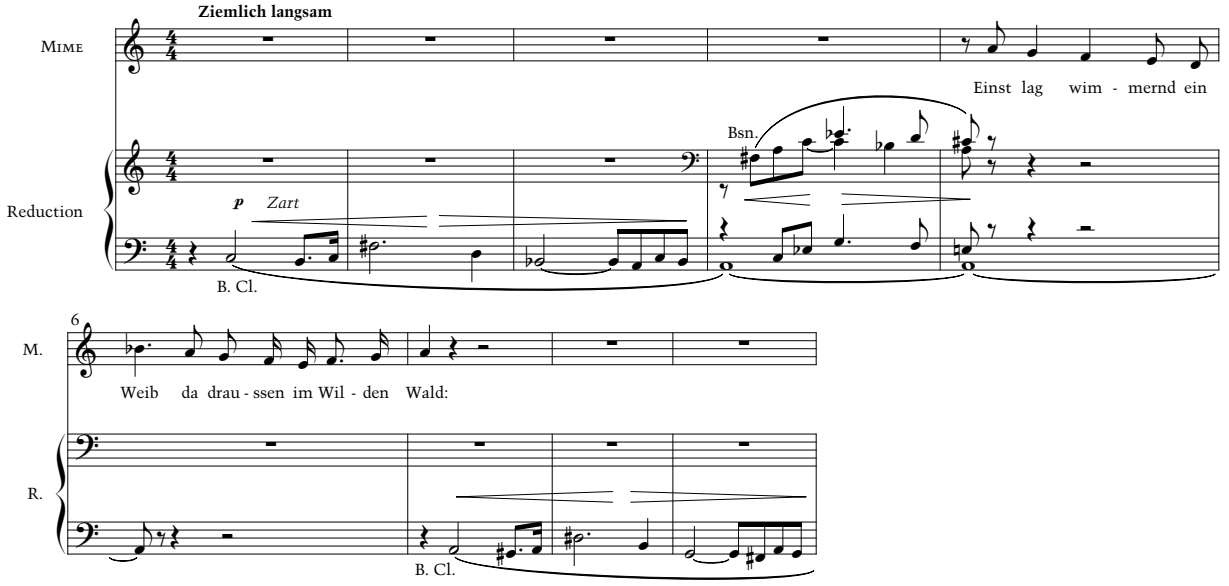
[13]For the remainder of this article, specific pages or measures will be identified according to either the page number or the page/system/measure of the Schirmer vocal scores. Many of my examples correspond to the Schirmer orchestral reductions, but in some cases I've altered the examples either for clarity or so that they more accurately reflect details of the orchestral score. Thus the examples do not always correspond exactly to the Schirmer editions. Though it may seem perverse to use vocal reductions in an article about the orchestra, space limitations make it necessary. Relevant instruments are identified in the examples, and readers are encouraged to compare each example with the full score.

[14]Deryck Cooke refers to this motive as the "Volsungs' Bond of Sympathy," in *An Introduction to* Der Ring Des Nibelungen, Wiener Philharmoniker, Sir Georg Solti (London: Decca Record [1968], 1995), D 208789. At this point in the cycle, however, it is more directly associated with Siegfried's longing for his mother, Sieglinde.

[15]Mime, of course, cannot express the genuine compassion of the human characters. His inability to replicate their themes, like Beckmesser's distortion of Walther's prize



Example 1: *Siegfried,* act II, sc. 2 (173/4/3–174/2/4).



Example 2: *Siegfried,* act I, sc. 1 (37/4/1–37/5/4).

sings the theme directly, but it does spring forth as part of his narration, indicating a direct conjunction between orchestra and voice. In other words, the orchestral theme may be more than a mere "unspoken" reminder to the audience of Sieglinde and her prior hardships; it may be a melody that both characters can actually hear, a physical presence among them. If so, the clarinet melody in ex. 1 could logically be heard as the projection of Siegfried's inner thoughts. As he begins to think about his mother, the orchestra, expressing his stream of consciousness, turns toward the melody that he had heard associated with his mother in act I. This suggests a radical orchestral split into two dimensions, both of which we, as audience members, can hear: the forest murmurs represent an "outer," sounding reality, while the clarinet melody represents an "inner" psychological state.[16]

In m. 9 of ex. 1, the situation becomes even more complicated in that Siegfried now sings the melody himself. Furthermore, what he sings is a transposition of the clarinet's prior melodic statement (now up a step). This theme is often presented as a sentence, designed in a relatively traditional manner: a basic idea, a sequential restatement, and a continuation leading to cadence.[17] In this case, Siegfried begins singing over the sequential restatement, contributing, in effect, to a thematic evolution that had already begun in the orchestra. This passage, then, appears to convey a complicated mix of "inner" and "outer" expressions: the strings in this interpretation represent something outside of Siegfried—the rustling leaves—and the clarinet theme seems to express his inner thoughts. Yet when he sings the theme out loud, how do we understand the orchestra? Is it "unheard" and "psychological"? Or is it actually heard by Siegfried as a physically sounding accompaniment, and not just as an internal melody?

There are also two other factors to consider. First, there is a definite emotional resonance in the orchestra; for instance, when Siegfried sings the word "Mutter" in m. 10 of ex. 1, the orchestra crescendos with a brief heightening of emotional intensity. It is easy to imagine all of these elements under Rosen's perspective, as a reflection of Siegfried's emotional state. Second, Kivy's notion of the orchestra as an expression of physical gesture is also potentially relevant. As Daniel Coren points out, the music in this scene continually fluctuates in direct relation to Siegfried's progressively relaxed physical positions: "With each new position, the music seems to penetrate more deeply into his psyche, until it passes beyond the level of verbal expression."[18] At the outset of ex. 1, Siegfried "leans farther back and looks up through the branches."[19] The quiet delicacy of the music responds to his state of relaxation.

Thus, in this single, short passage, the orchestra conveys at least four different aspects of the drama: the natural scene (the forest murmurs), Siegfried's inner thoughts, Siegfried's physical state (his gradual relaxation), and his emotional state. And to complicate matters further, it is unclear exactly which of these orchestral expressions Siegfried hears outside himself. Which sounds from the orchestra are physically present in his world? Which, if any, are internal and imaginary? Is it possible to tell the difference?

song in *Die Meistersinger,* is sometimes noted for its resonance with Wagner's deplorable characterization of Jews in *Das Judentum in der Musik* and many succeeding writings, especially numerous in the last decade or so of his life. See, for instance, Marc Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 103–94.

[16]This issue reflects the common distinction, especially in film studies, between diegetic and nondiegetic music (sometimes referred to as "source" vs. "background" music). For an overview of such issues, see David Neumeyer's introduction to *Music and Cinema,* ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2000), pp. 17–22.

[17]For an in-depth description of sentence conventions in the Classical period, see William Caplin, *Classical Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 35–48. For more on sentence structures in the music of Wagner, see Matthew BaileyShea, "Wagner's Loosely Knit Sentences and the Drama of Musical Form," *Intégral* 16/17 (2002/2003), 1–34.

[18]Daniel Coren, *A Study of Wagner's Siegfried* (Ph.D. diss. University of California at Berkeley, 1971), p. 194, quoted in Patrick McCreless, *Wagner's* Siegfried: *Its Drama, History, and Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), p. 177.

[19]The text and translation appear in Richard Wagner, *Siegfried,* trans. Frederick Jameson (New York: G. Schirmer, 1904), p. 173.

Naturally, there can be no definitive answer to any of these questions, but the questions are important nonetheless. The way we interpret the role of the orchestra—the way we *imagine* it—profoundly affects our reception of operatic works. What we strive for, then, are ways of imagining the orchestra that offer compelling and powerful experiences of a given piece. In that spirit, I offer the following "fully diegetic" perspective, a way of imagining the orchestra that could potentially be applied to all aspects of Wagner's *Ring,* but is best applied specifically in situations where characters appear to exhibit distinct control over the orchestra. The perspective is best defined as follows.

The world of Wagner's *Ring,* as Cone suggests, is essentially musical. Within this world, the orchestra is a constant presence *even when silent.* It is, in some sense, a mythical element, like air or water, a medium through which the characters of the cycle continually move, speak, sing, and act. The orchestra, then, is an invisible, but permanent presence. Moreover, it has a voice. In fact, it has multiple voices. Each layer of sound (the various instruments) is able to communicate certain ideas and react to the dramatic action. And because of its stratification into different layers it is able to react to multiple things at once. However—and this is absolutely crucial—the orchestra, despite possessing an independent voice, is *fundamentally passive and reactive*. It rarely asserts its independence. In other words, it almost never "speaks" for itself, but instead reacts to the movements, emotions, desires, and energies of the very characters that it envelops. Its music resounds in response to outside forces, sympathetically vibrating like wind chimes. It is responsive, moreover, to both the "inner" and "outer" aspects of a scene, the natural conditions and physical gestures as well as the hidden emotions and thoughts of a given character. More importantly, the orchestra is a malleable force. Though typically existing as an independent flow of sound, passively reacting to the various aspects of a given scene, it is also an energy that can be harnessed and controlled. Since characters live within this continuous tissue of sound—since they are capable of feeling and hearing its presence—they are also aware of its power to create a certain aura, its power of persuasion. In short, it is a medium through which they can exert their will.[20]

To my knowledge, this way of imagining the orchestra has never been fully defined as a distinct mode of interpretation. Yet many Wagner scholars have heard passages in precisely this way, with analytical descriptions that often betray this exact interpretive position. Consider, for instance, the language Warren Darcy uses in his book on *Das Rheingold*. Discussing a passage in sc. 1, he writes: "[Alberich's] anger wrenches the bass chromatically downward from G to F." Later, in sc. 2, after Wotan attempts to renege on his pact with the giants, Darcy describes the reaction as follows: "Fasolt's astonishment triggers some violent chromatic explosions, but Fafner's dark words restore . . . the tonal equilibrium and nudge Fasolt towards the dominant of F." Perhaps more suggestive, especially with regard to the exertion of power, he describes the end of the crucial C♯-minor exchange between Wotan and Erda in sc. 4 as follows: "Erda begins to disappear, [the G♯ dominant] slides toward its upper neighbor A; Wotan attempts to restrain her by forcing the neighbour [*sic*] to revolve through a German augmented sixth chord back to the dominant. However, Erda gradually slips away from Wotan, and her tonality dissolves."[21] This language, of course, might be read simply as a kind of analytic poetic license, not meant to be taken in literal terms. But it reflects a broader perspective that can be quite powerful with regard to Wagner's *Ring*. Carolyn Abbate, who is deeply sensitive to the complexities of the instrumental voice, often discusses Wagner's orchestra in such terms. She describes Brünnhilde's ecstatic presentation of the "Redemption" motive at the end of *Götterdämmerung*:[22] "[Brünnhilde's] vocal entry . . . is precisely timed to twist a sustained high D

[20]Kivy suggests that the role of the orchestra should have a direct parallel in the natural world. There is, of course, no exact parallel for this view of the orchestra in our world, but the lack of correspondence does not concern me.

[21]Warren Darcy, *Wagner's* Das Rheingold (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 106, 143, 201.

[22]This is the famous theme heard at the very end of the cycle as the curtain falls. Cooke labels the theme "Redemption." Wagner himself referred to it as the "Glorification of Brünnhilde."

into the melody that she wants; with that eighth-note D, she whips the orchestra around and forms it into *her* voice. The polyphonic web of her singing and its orchestral echoes is further spun of musical ideas that she *authored,* as the first voice in the Ring to sing them" (italics in original).[23] Note that all of this language involves physical energy: "twisting," "wrenching," etc. The implication is that the orchestra is a medium that normally operates according to free-flowing, unseen forces, but with enough power it can be controlled by a character for rhetorical purposes to achieve a certain goal and express a certain intention. Similarly, Cone's perspective assumes that characters can, indeed, compose their own accompaniments, but it is different in that, under this perspective, characters more often than not alter, mold, or reshape the orchestra's music rather than create it anew. Nevertheless, the perspective empowers characters in surprising ways, often with important gender implications. Mary Ann Smart, for instance, speaks of Kundry's mimetic moments in *Parsifal* as a kind of life-force, the loss of which contributes to a loss of "vitality, of the power to compel the gaze as agent rather than object, the power to stir the orchestra into motion around her."[24]

Naturally, this perspective is primarily encouraged by Wagner's unique musical and dramatic designs, but is also a basic fallout of his most famous theatrical innovation: submerging the orchestra under the stage. Once the music is visually cut off from its source, it becomes an enveloping, translucent substance within the fictional world of the drama—an interpretation that echoes a great deal of Wagner reception, from Nietzsche's complaints about "swimming" in the music (when he'd rather be dancing) to Ernst Kurth's description of Wagnerian harmony as "a light, thin and extraordinarily sensitive film."[25]

Siegfried does not consciously control the orchestra in ex. 1, but the fully diegetic perspective may be applied to the example nonetheless. In this interpretation, the orchestra is a hovering presence within Siegfried's world, and it reacts and responds to everything that happens onstage, whether directly visible, like the rustling branches, or hidden, as with Siegfried's inner thoughts and emotions. Within the world of the *Ring,* all aspects of the dramatic action have a direct resonance in the orchestra; it is an invisible, but audible element that, in effect, binds everything together. All energy that passes through the transparent tissue of the orchestra, whether thoughts or actions, leaves a musical trail. Thus, the sounds in this example—the wavering forest murmurs and the "Bond of Sympathy" motive—are physically present in Siegfried's world. There is no distinction between "inner music" and "outer music." There is no music that only Siegfried can hear; no music that only the audience can hear. It all has the potential to be heard by anyone who is listening.

Naturally, this mode of interpretation is extreme in that it situates all orchestral music in the diegetic realm. It thereby eliminates the possibility for a complex interweaving of diegetic and nondiegetic music, long recognized as a hallmark of great operatic works. This, of course, could be deemed a weakness in the proposed interpretive model. The benefit, however, is that rather than hear the orchestra as a mere supplement to the onstage drama, it actually becomes a distinct and continuous element *within* the drama. As we will see, this way of imagining the orchestra has powerful ramifications with regard to the epic dialogues in the *Ring* where characters struggle dramatically for orchestral control.

Before turning to a more specific analysis, however, we must address two obvious problems. First, if all of the orchestral music in the *Ring* is diegetic, how do we distinguish be-

[23]Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices,* p. 244.
[24]Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania,* p. 204.
[25]See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* in *The Portable Nietzsche,* trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), p. 666; and Ernst Kurth, *Selected Writings,* trans. Lee Rothfarb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 104. Note that both of these authors describe the music as a physical substance, but they also significantly place themselves within the mythological world of the music, suggesting that the listener, too, is enveloped by the orchestra. Lawrence Kramer, from whom I borrowed the Kurth quote above, discusses some of the implications of this in *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 35–36.

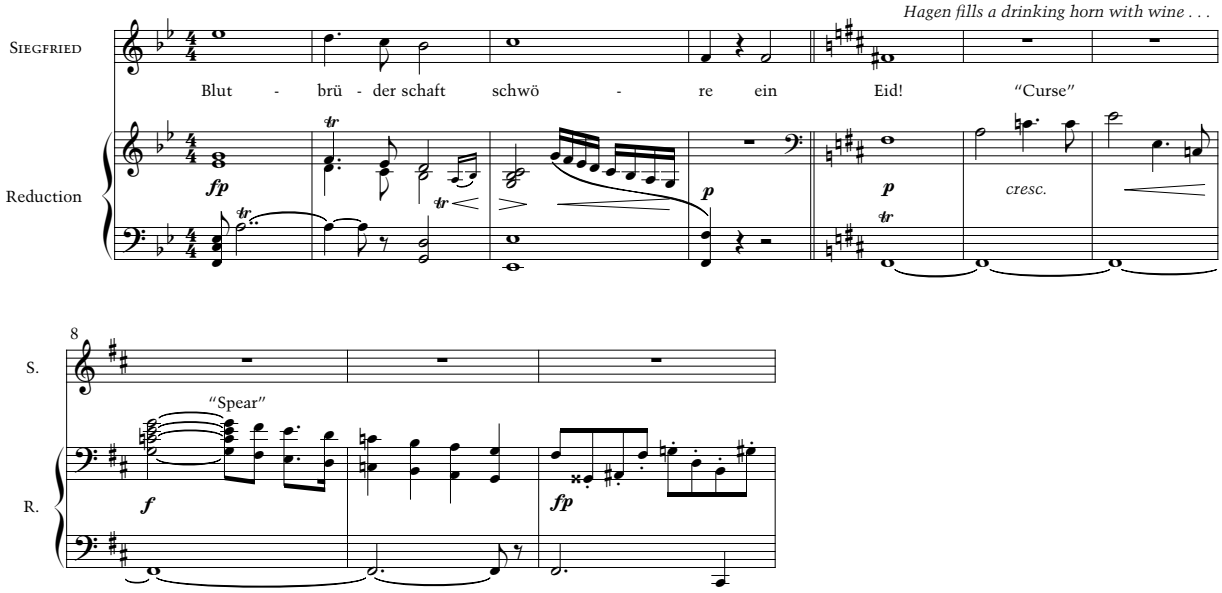
tween traditional onstage diegetic music, such as Siegfried's horn calls, and the "invisible" diegetic music of the orchestral medium? Clearly, the only way to sustain the proposed mode of interpretation would be to argue that although all orchestral sounds are essentially diegetic—they are all present in the world of Wagner's characters—onstage instrumental performance simply represents a more direct way of asserting control. This would include both the onstage instruments, like Siegfried's horn, as well as the singing voices themselves. In other words, the characters in the *Ring* have the power to channel the energy of the orchestra to produce their own accompaniments without singing or picking up an actual instrument, but by doing so they can make direct, unmediated musical statements without mentally/emotionally altering the orchestral fabric. Thus this mode of interpretation maintains a distinction between the onstage musical performances and the background orchestra even if both are understood to operate in the diegetic realm.[26]

A second, more significant problem is this: if, as discussed above, the orchestra is a physical, sounding entity that, among other things, reacts to the inner emotions and intentions of the characters in a given scene, how do we interpret moments when the orchestra communicates meanings that the characters simply could not, logically, be understood to hear? This question is especially pertinent to moments of scheming and deception. Example 3 presents an obvious case from act I, sc. 2, of *Götterdämmerung*. This is the crucial moment when Hagen initiates the "Blood Brotherhood" pact between Siegfried and Gunther. At this moment we hear a statement of both the "Curse" motive and the "Spear" motive, along with the corresponding, symbolic juxtaposition of F♯ and C. Even a listener unaware that the "Curse" theme consistently marks a victim of the Ring's power (Fasolt, Fafner, Mime, and in this case Siegfried and Gunther) would still surely recognize its dark, portentous overtones. And even without knowing that the "Spear" motive represents the hollow, hypocrisy of unnatural law, this listener would still be able to intuit its overriding sense of dread and darkness in this context. Why, then, do Siegfried and Gunther not hear this? Why don't they *feel* this? If the orchestra is a physical, sounding entity, reacting to Hagen's evil intentions and the curse of the ring, why do the other characters fall so unwittingly into his trap? Is it not more intuitive to hear this passage along the lines that Wagner himself suggested, with the orchestra as a modern version of the classic Greek chorus, set apart from the stage drama, and communicating information to the audience that the characters themselves cannot access?

This is, of course, a viable alternative, and there is certainly no reason to hold the same mode of interpretation vis-à-vis the orchestra throughout the entire cycle. But there is, nevertheless, one way of upholding our prior interpretive stance. It involves the simple distinction between hearing and listening. Just because the orchestra produces music that all of the characters *can* hear doesn't mean that they actually *listen* to it. And considering that Siegfried and Gunther are under the spell of Hagen's manipulative powers, it is certainly possible that these characters simply fail to heed the obvious warning signs around them. In fact, we might even go further in defining the proposed operatic landscape by stating that characters *rarely* pay attention to the orchestra's presence, despite its ubiquity (or, perhaps, because of its ubiquity). This position resonates rather well with Carolyn Abbate's discussion of the *Ring* in *Unsung Voices*. She addresses the idea that characters often turn a deaf ear to their musical surroundings. Brünnhilde, as she argues, has a particularly acute sense of hearing—she rarely misses the intimations of the voices around her—but even she is not immune to the chronic "deafness" in the *Ring:*

> Brünnhilde has one seeming deaf spot: she refuses to hear her sister Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung* act I,

[26] A useful comparison is to think of this in terms of "the force" in the *Stars Wars* movies. A Jedi, for instance, has the ability to move his/her light saber with traditional physical movement, but can also move it (and other objects) simply with mind control. Similarly, Siegfried can control the orchestra by exerting a certain mental and/or emotional energy, but he can also pick up an instrument, such as his horn, and make music in a more traditional and direct manner.



Example 3: *Götterdämmerung,* act I, sc. 2 (75/3/2–75/4/2).

whose plea "hör' mich, hör meine Angst" [hear me, hear my fear] is ignored, and whose words are calmly dismissed as "banger Träume Mären" [stories born of anxious dreams]. This refusal is made ironic by subtle and fragmentary musical references to the *Todesverkündigung* within Waltraute's narrative, and music that Brünnhilde once heard so acutely (and acted upon so completely) now apparently goes unnoticed.[27]

By adopting this perspective, the idea of the orchestra as a constant, physical presence in the world of the *Ring* can be maintained, even in situations where characters seem unaware of its music. In that sense, we can still preserve the concept of the orchestra as fully diegetic without entirely minimizing its "Greek chorus" effect. To be sure, the orchestra resonates with reminiscence, foreboding, and commentary, but all of this is understood as a direct reverberation of the characters, emotions, and events that pass through the orchestral medium.

Nevertheless, though the characters often ignore these surrounding sounds, there are occasional moments when they seem *intensely* aware of the orchestra. It is at these moments that they appear most strongly to exert control over it. To understand this perspective better, I now turn to a consideration of the final scene of *Die Walküre*.

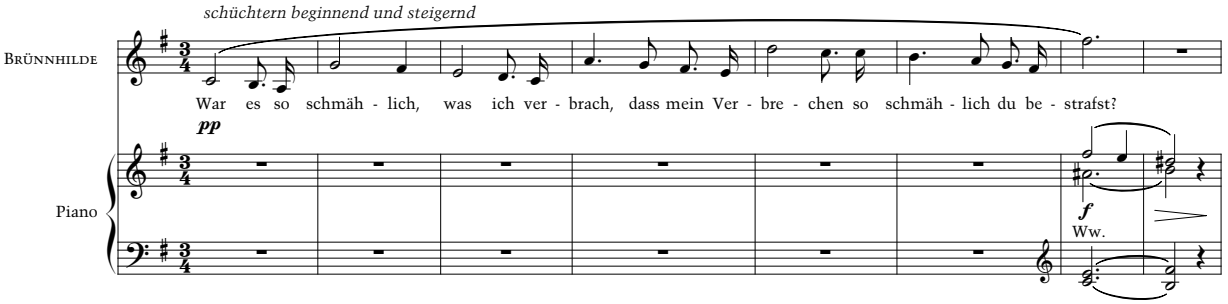
A Brief Analysis of *Die Walküre*, Act III, Sc. 3

This scene provides a relatively clear situation in which a character—in this case Brünnhilde—can be heard to control the orchestra in service of a distinct rhetorical intention. Just before this scene begins, Brünnhilde is sentenced to a humiliating and horrid fate by her father, Wotan. She defies his command in act II by attempting to save Siegmund's life, and her resulting punishment, as decreed by Wotan, is to be stripped of her identity as a Valkyrie. She is to be bound to a rock, where the first man to come her way will take her as his bride. Forever abandoned by Wotan, she will be reduced to human status, a warrior cursed to a life of domestication and servitude.

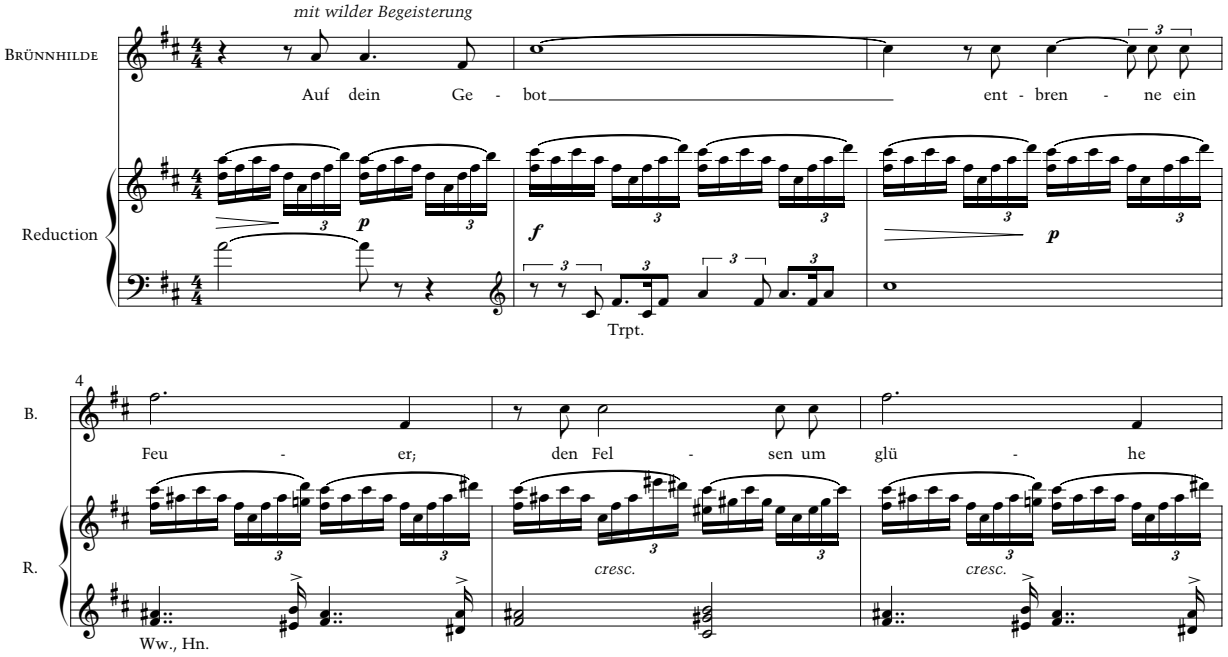
The scene begins with both Brünnhilde and Wotan in a state of utter despondency. Brünnhilde, however, eventually gathers her strength and initiates a dialogue with Wotan that builds

[27]Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices,* p. 229.

a. (265/4/1–265/4/7).



b. (288/2/2–289/4/1).

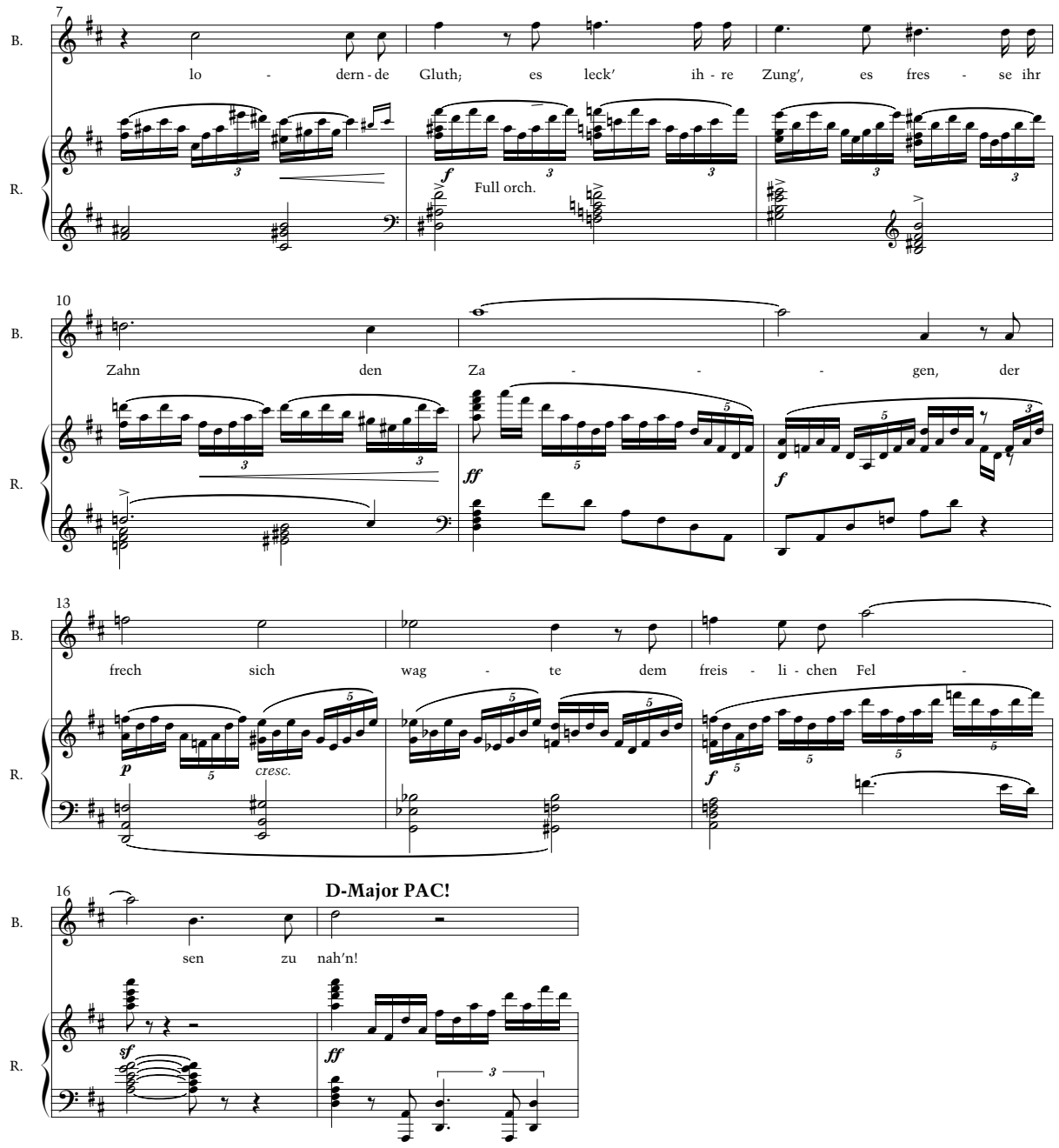


Example 4: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3.

toward two successive rhetorical goals. She first attempts, without success, to convince Wotan to withdraw his punishment altogether. When this fails—when she ultimately accepts her fate—she quickly works toward an alternative, lesser goal: to persuade Wotan to protect her with a circle of fire so that only a hero can take her for a wife. This, of course, is successful, and ultimately sets the stage for the dramatic arc of *Siegfried*.

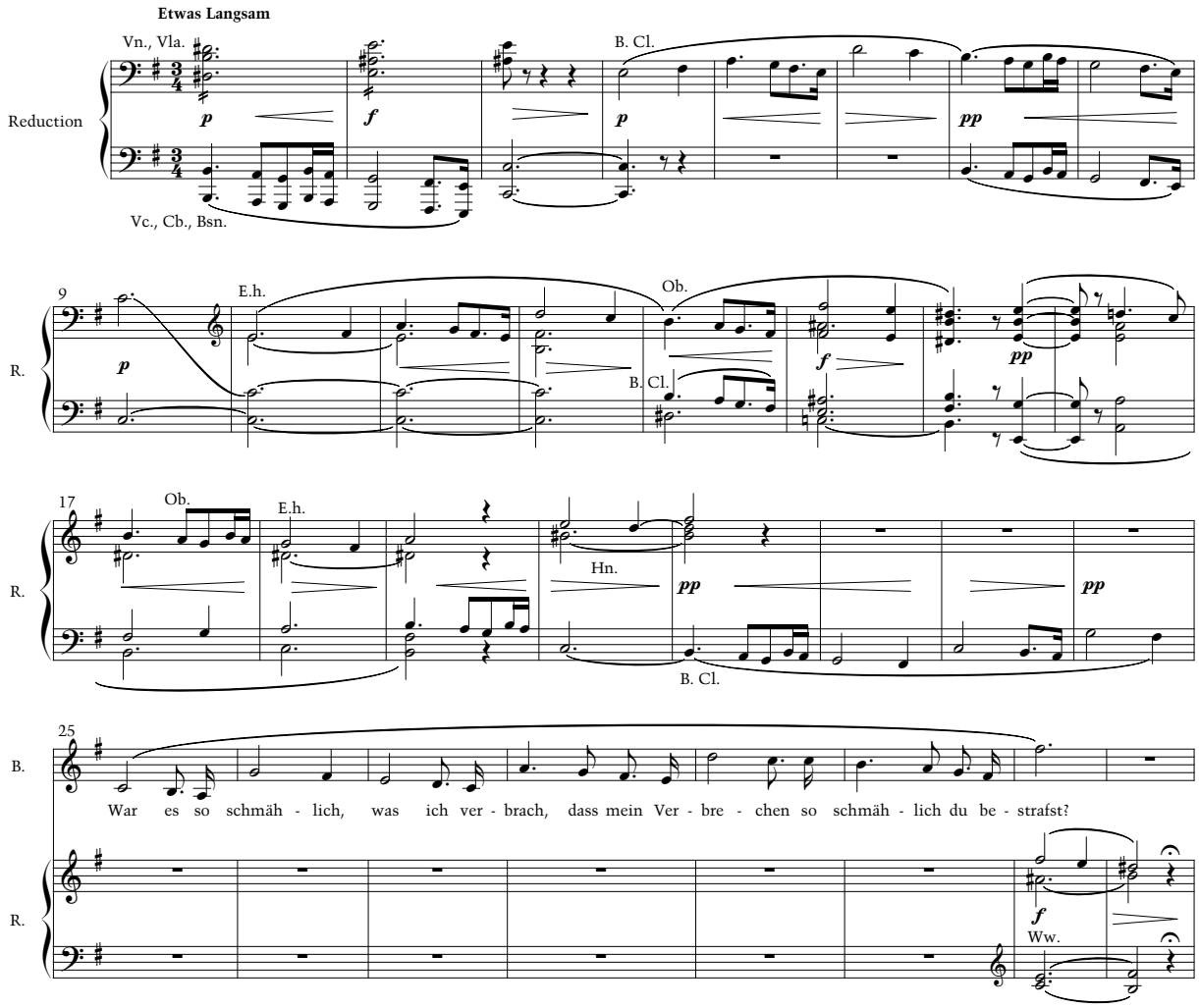
To get a better sense of the scene's overall shape, compare Brünnhilde's opening statement (ex. 4a) with her final exhortation near the scene's end (ex. 4b). The difference is profound. She begins with palpable timidity, entirely unaccompanied by the orchestra (*schüchtern beginnend,* according to Wagner's stage directions). Her first statement is a question, asked with weak, interrogative "upspeak." In stark contrast, at the end of the scene, she is in full command of the entire orchestra. Her final statement is declarative, expressed with "wild ecstasy" (*mit wilder Begeisterung*). And whereas her first utterance was punctuated by an interrogative half-cadence, this final command is closed with an explosive perfect authentic cadence. She begins the scene *pianissimo* and closes *fortissimo*. She opens in the minor mode and closes in the major. The differences could hardly be more extreme.

b. (*continued*)



Example 4 (*continued*)

How, then, does Brünnhilde achieve such a radical transformation? The scope of this scene is far too large to offer a comprehensive analysis, but the following discussion will at least address aspects of the overall shape. To begin with, let's consider the scene's opening, as shown in ex. 5. It is clear that the scene does not actually begin with Brünnhilde's opening statement, but with an extended orchestral introduction. How are we to understand this mu-



Example 5: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (265/1/1–265/4/7).

sic? Wagner's stage directions refer to a "long, solemn silence" (*Langes feierliches Schweigen*). We might assume, then, that this music is unheard by Wotan and Brünnhilde, a quiet expression of their inner emotional states (which, in many ways, are identical). The characters remain in fixed positions, motionless and unmoved (*unveränderte Stellung*). Yet in the third system of the example, when Brünnhilde raises her head, something extraordinary happens. At this precise moment, before she speaks, we begin to recognize the glimmer of resistance, the root of her ultimate persuasion. She *hears* the orchestra at this point. We know this because her opening melody flows seamlessly from the prior melody of the bass clarinet. In mm. 22 and 23 of the example, the bass clarinet sounds a short, two-measure idea, marked by the crucial tritone leap from F♯ to C. In the next measure, we hear the motive again, an octave higher, but its second half is now appropriated by Brünnhilde. The orchestra's voice, in other words, becomes her own. This may be interpreted in a number of ways. We might hear it, for instance, as a seamless shift from Brünnhilde's inner thoughts to her outer expression, a fluid shift from the nondiegetic to the diegetic. Although this idea has its merits, I propose an alternative: that Brünnhilde, the moment she raises her head, realizes that she

Table 1
Some basic ways that a character can exhibit orchestral control

• Eliciting or altering a familiar Leitmotif	• Creating a new Leitmotif
• Manipulating the "strong" orchestral sections (brass and strings)	• Imposing tonal closure (cadence), especially in an associative key
• Changing key	• Changing tempo / meter
• Silencing the orchestra	• Altering articulation / dynamics

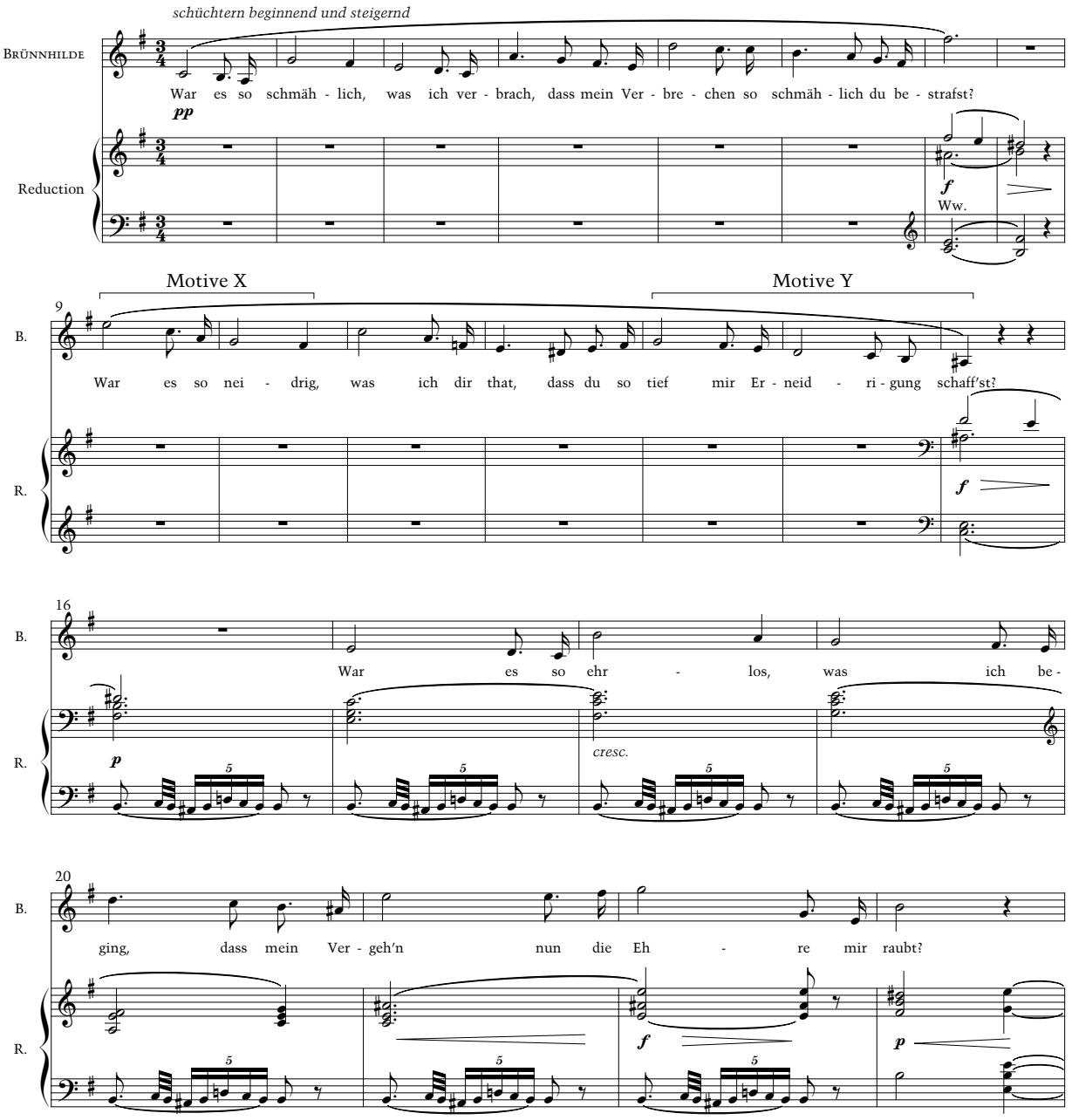
needs to marshal all of her rhetorical skills to save herself, and that control over the orchestra—as a continuous diegetic presence—will be especially crucial. When she sings her opening question in the fourth system of the example she doesn't just silence the orchestra, she *commandeers* it. Up until that point, it had been sounding its despondent themes as a free-flowing reaction to Wotan and Brünnhilde's despair. Once Brünnhilde begins to sing, however, it no longer reacts, independently, to the overall emotional and physical environment; it becomes subject to her willful control.

At this point it is worth reconsidering Brünnhilde's position. Wotan has just finished expressing a violent rage, an anger no doubt unlike anything that Brünnhilde has ever experienced (he is, after all, the god of thunder, the "war father"). She is in no position to challenge him physically and, given her precarious situation, her only chance of overturning his decree is to appeal to characteristics that Wotan is not prepared to acknowledge at this point: guilt, compassion, and love. Thus, in order for Brünnhilde to change Wotan's mind, she needs to proceed cautiously. She is in an obvious position of weakness, and exerting control over the orchestra requires an energy that has to be built up gradually. What tools, then, does she have at her disposal? How can she twist the orchestral fabric toward a specific rhetorical end? Table 1 displays some possibilities. Among other things, she can call forth and construct motivic ideas, especially those that appeal to Wotan's sense of guilt and compassion. In the realm of harmony, she can redirect the music toward certain keys and modes, for instance, shuttling the music from minor to major. Likewise, she can attempt to control cadences. In the world of the *Ring*, articulating tonal closure is often equated with proving a point or making an assertion, especially when the defined key has distinct associative connotations.[28] She can also alter the orchestral texture and timbre, to say nothing of other musical parameters including meter, articulation, and dynamics.

All of these possibilities are exploited over the course of the scene, some right from the start. In ex. 6, Brünnhilde begins without accompaniment but gradually accrues orchestral support, beginning with a small woodwind ensemble. The woodwinds convey a sense of timidity that reflects a larger issue: in terms of orchestral sections, control of the brass and strings tends to act as a more powerful gesture. (Wotan, for instance, will respond to Brünnhilde's opening with quiet brass and string accompaniment.) Nevertheless, Brünnhilde continues to build toward ever greater control. Her opening gambit involves three rhetorical questions followed by a direct plea for Wotan to soften his rage and uncover his guilt. Brünnhilde's language alone reveals her as a brilliant orator, turning Wotan's language of shame into a portrait of unjust victimization: "Was my deed so disgraceful that I should sink deep in disgrace?"[29] This rhetorical skill ex-

[28]This is true in the operas of many of Wagner's predecessors as well, but authentic cadences in the *Ring* are much less common than in earlier operas; the effect is arguably more dramatic.

[29]This language directly counters Wotan's own rhetoric from act III, sc. 2, where he uses words of honor to demonstrate Brünnhilde's dishonor. See pp. 246*ff*. of the Schirmer vocal score.



Example 6: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (265/4/1–266/2/3).

tends to her manipulation of motivic material. Her first two questions, largely unaccompanied, feature allusions to motives of shame and humiliation, particularly the motives identified as X and Y in this example. Both of these fragments are allusions to motives that Wotan himself had sung to Brünnhilde in his desperate monologue from act II.[30] The motive marked X was sung most memorably by Alberich at the

[30]One powerful aspect of this last scene is its expression of the culmination of Brünnhilde's development as a "human" character. Though Wotan has not yet punished her, she has already achieved human status, in some sense, by

point when Wotan steals the ring in *Das Rheingold* (p. 171 of the vocal score). It recurs in Wotan's monologue, but only in altered forms. (Wotan recognizes that he and Alberich represent two sides of the same coin—"der lichte Albe" and "der schwarze Albe"—but he rarely acknowledges it.) Motive Y appears throughout the cycle, and though it takes on a variety of dramatic associations—initially associated with "woman's worth" in *Das Rheingold*—it is memorably sung by Wotan to Brünnhilde in act II just before his famous monologue, setting the words "I am the most miserable of all" (Der Traurigste bin ich von Allen!, p. 110 of the vocal score).[31] The descending stepwise motion is also related to the "Spear" motive, thus linking Wotan's misery to his flawed treaties and law. By alluding to these motives of shame and despair, Brünnhilde prepares her principal argument: that she herself was innocently hoping to alleviate Wotan's hidden guilt.

At the end of the first two questions, Brünnhilde manages to elicit weak orchestral support, forming simple half cadences to underscore her interrogative stance. However, after the second question, she activates a broader accompanimental swell. The last four notes of her second question trigger the "funeral march" theme in the cellos.[32] This not only serves to further remind Wotan of the consequences of his treaties—the theme originally foreshadowed Siegmund's immanent death, a death determined by Wotan's laws—but also strengthens Brünnhilde's prolonged dominant harmony. At this point, Brünnhilde is not ready to initiate a change of key from the prevailing E minor, but the swelling dominant harmony begins to emphasize the urgency of her questions. Toward the end of this opening gambit, Brünnhilde makes her boldest move (see ex. 7). She physically rises to her knees and correspondingly lifts the orchestra toward a *fortissimo* dynamic in m. 36 of the example.[33] She now abandons her questions and shifts toward desperate declarative statements (a rhetorical strategy that she will repeat throughout the scene). Most boldly of all, perhaps, she temporarily thrusts the harmony toward D minor—a key far removed from the prevailing E-minor tonality—and she does this with the phrase "show me clearly the hidden guilt" [deute mir hell die dunkle Schuld]. D minor is the key of Siegmund and Sieglinde's sorrow and in this case is used by Brünnhilde as a striking rhetorical gesture: she asks Wotan to reveal his hidden shame while revealing it herself in the orchestra through tonal allusion. She recognizes, however, that it is too early to extend such bold maneuvers and abruptly reverts back to her dominant prolongation, closing with a brief tonicization of V.

In ex. 8, we reach a crucial moment with regard to our overall mode of interpretation. Here, Wotan responds to Brünnhilde, and one might argue that the continuity in the orchestra precludes any direct control by either character. This reflects back on Rosen's questions about who, exactly, composes the music in situations that involve multiple characters. Does Brünnhilde still control the orchestra at this point, or is it now under Wotan's control? Notably, just before this example (at the end of ex. 7) the orchestra returns to the music that opened the scene, with almost identical orchestration—the only difference is that the bass line is no longer doubled by bassoons—and this offers the clearest possible response to the problem: the return of the opening material suggests that Brünnhilde lets go of her orchestral control at this point as a gesture of hope. Wotan has remained unmoved both physically and emotionally throughout her entire first gambit, and by opening up the orchestra to his control, she hopes for some kind of reaction on his part.

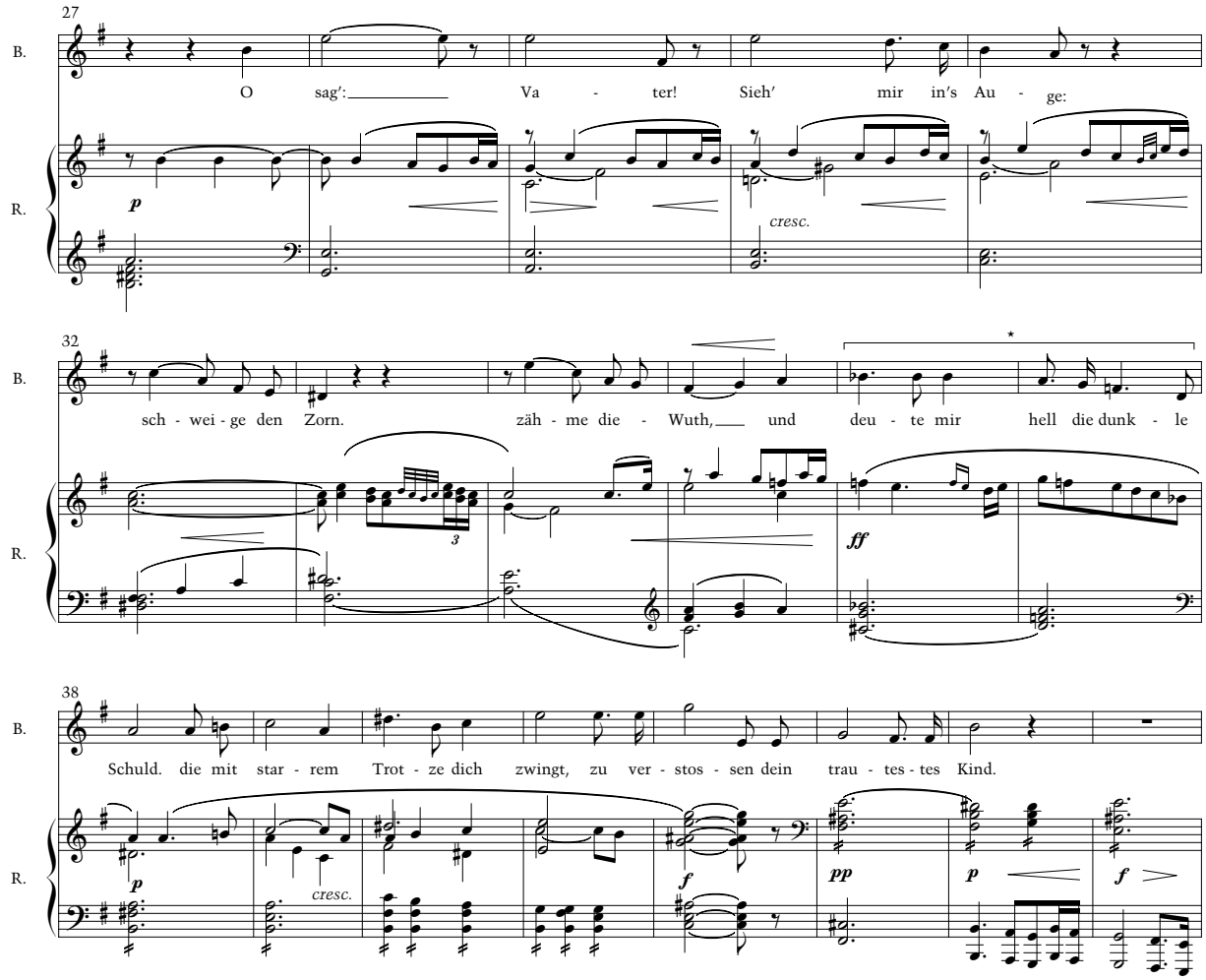
He does react, but barely. When Brünnhilde gives up control, the orchestra simply returns

developing a deep compassion, for both Wotan and Siegmund. Her prior exchanges with these characters have not only taught her to feel compassion, but also how to *elicit* compassion. In this final scene, her rhetorical delivery is significantly influenced by her exchanges with Wotan and Siegmund earlier in the opera.

[31]Cooke hears this theme as an offshoot of the "Renunciation of Love" theme. He refers to it as the second form of the "Renunciation of Love" motive.

[32]The theme is bound by the same four notes: D–C–B–A♯. Also, note that her use of the cellos reveals an expanded orchestral palette.

[33]The measure numbers are defined from the beginning of ex. 6.

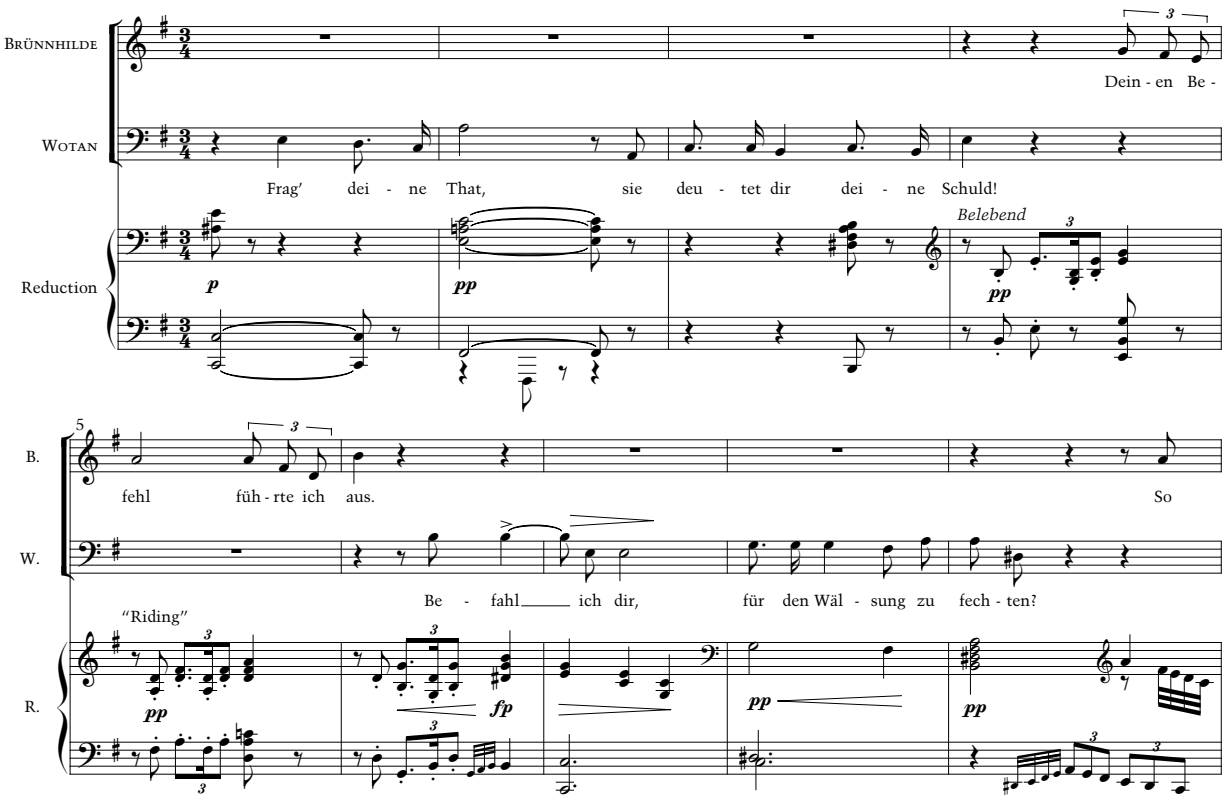


Example 7: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (266/2/6–267/1/4).

to its initial, free-flowing reflection of Wotan's despondency (the bass motive is often described as "Wotan's Frustration"). However, Wotan does exert some control with a simple, stubborn gesture: a perfect authentic cadence in E minor.[34] This cadence sets up an important contrast between Wotan and Brünnhilde. Of all the different ways a character can control the orchestra, bringing it to complete closure in a particular key is often the most powerful and authoritative. Brünnhilde, throughout much of this scene, lacks that ability; she builds almost all of her rhetorical structures on dominant prolongations. Wotan, on the other hand, often creates closed cadences, primarily in the minor mode. For that reason, Brünnhilde's perfect authentic cadence in D major at the end of the scene is especially dramatic. By that point, the dynamic has shifted, and her closure in D major punctuates her rhetorical success.

Here in ex. 8, however, Wotan remains unmoved. Brünnhilde responds with her "Riding" theme, shifting, as it typically does, from the minor tonic (in this case E minor) to the mediant

[34]As suggested above, there is also an important instrumental contrast: Wotan is accompanied by brass and strings, whereas Brünnhilde had been accompanied primarily by woodwinds.



Example 8: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (267/1/4–267/3/2).

(G major). Wotan, however, doesn't allow this to continue. He permits no shift to the major mode. Instead, he brushes aside Brünnhilde's ascending themes with a descent back into E minor. This, then, presents a clear change in atmosphere. The characters are now aware of the dynamic. Brünnhilde attempts to persuade Wotan through her use of vocal rhetoric and orchestral control, but he is now prepared to counter with orchestral control of his own. A struggle has thus begun, the outcome of which will define Brünnhilde's fate.

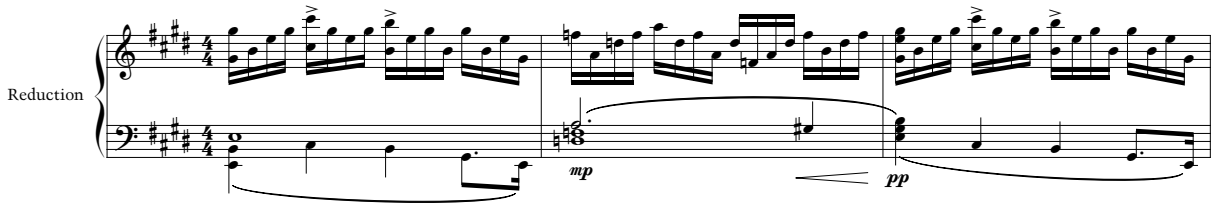
Since it would be undesirable, of course, to continue this play-by-play account for the entire scene—which extends over a hundred pages of orchestral score—it will have to suffice to point out a few important markers between Brünnhilde's unaccompanied opening and her complete harnessing of orchestral control toward the end of the scene. Before continuing, however, it is worthwhile to consider the scene's overall tonal structure. Table 2 offers a loose overview of the scene's form.[35] From a global, tonal perspective, the scene is best analyzed in the key of E, progressing from the minor mode at the outset to the major mode at the end. The scene begins with obvious dominant prolongation, as discussed above, but eventually flows into a complex wandering tonality throughout the later sections. This conveys the gradual heightening of dramatic tension as the two characters become more intent on orchestral control. D tonality in particular surfaces throughout the scene. This, in turn, encapsulates the tonal progress of the entire opera, which opens in D minor and closes in E major. As many commentators have pointed out, the closing measures of *Die Walküre* embody this

[35]For the sake of brevity, I prefer not to offer the typical—and typically tedious—comparisons with sectional divisions by Alfred Lorenz. Interested readers should consult vol. 1 of *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner* (Berlin: Hesse, 1924–33), esp. pp. 33–34.

Table 2
Proposed sectional divisions of *Die Walküre,* act III, scene 3

Sections*	Tonality**
Section 1, 265/1/1 to 268/4/2	Prolongs dominant of E minor
Section 2, 268/4/2 to 273/4/2	Continues to prolong dominant of E minor
Section 3, 273/4/2 to 278/2/5	Wanders from E major to A♭ minor
Section 4, 278/2/5 to 283/3/3	Wanders though various keys but returns to E minor
Section 5, 283/3/3 to 290/1/2	Wanders through various keys and closes in D major
Section 6, 290/1/2 to 295/2/5	Wandering tonality, closes in E major
Section 7, 295/2/5 to 299/2/2	Prolongs E major
Section 8, 299/2/2 to 304/5/4	Passes through the "Magic Fire" sequence, closes in E major

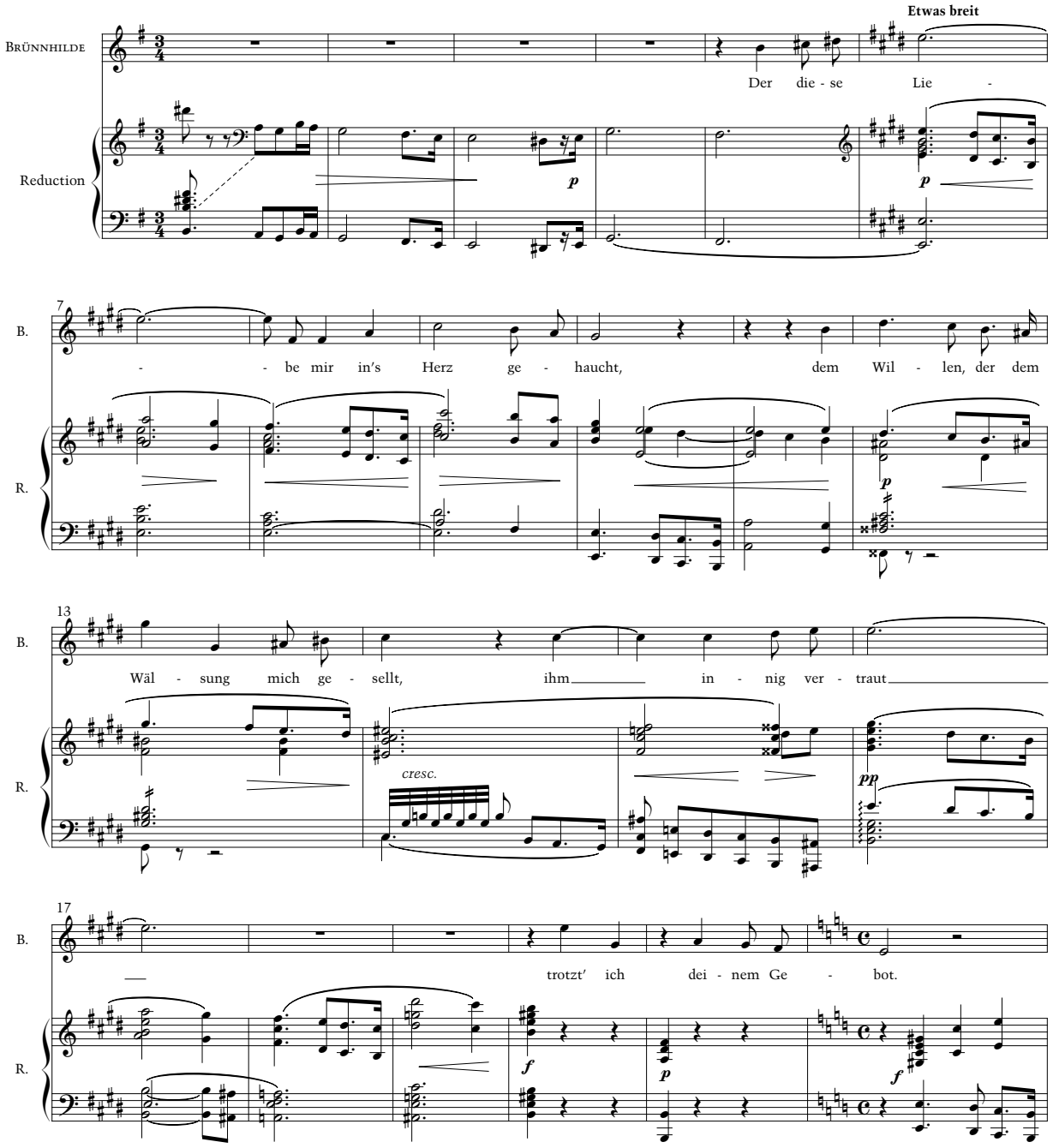
*The first five sections are largely defined by returns to the scene's opening material, with each opening incipit becoming progressively shorter.
**Overall trajectory is E minor to E major



Example 9: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (304/3/1–3).

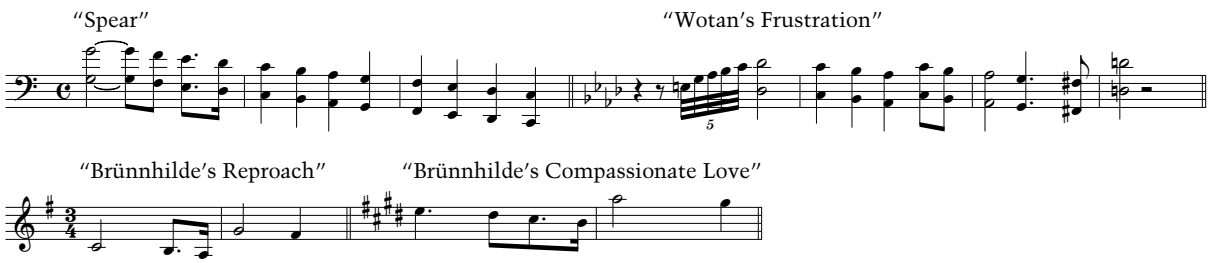
motion with a single harmonic progression, an altered version of the "Fate" motive that moves from D minor to E major (see ex. 9). Much of the dramatic tension in this scene operates within the movement between E and D tonality and between the major and minor modes. Wotan holds strongly to E minor at the scene's outset, but Brünnhilde ultimately draws the orchestra into a D-major cadence for her concluding lines. Brünnhilde is the champion of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and D major represents the triumph of their union. (Much of their existence had been defined under the torment of an overriding D-minor tonality. By contrast, D major accompanies their gaze at the end of the first scene. It is also the key in which Siegfried, their son, forges the sword at the end of *Siegfried,* act I.) Wotan, however, does not yield completely to Brünnhilde's choice of key. He redirects the orchestra back to E tonality, but now accepts the major mode for the first time, closing the opera with an obvious show of compassion in E major.

Returning to surface details, we see that quite early on in the scene Brünnhilde anticipates the final tonality by shifting the music toward E major at 274/1/1 (see ex. 10). This is a moment of exquisite beauty, and its expressive impact results from a variety of factors. Most obviously, it is the first conclusive shift from E minor to E major. Also, thematically, it represents the culmination of a gradual thematic transformation that corresponds precisely to Brünnhilde's overall rhetorical goal: as shown in ex. 11, the theme unveiled here is ultimately derived from the obstinate descending scale of the "Spear" motive. It is eventually reshaped, however, into a theme of compassion, identi-



Example 10: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (273/4/2–274/3/4).

fied by Deryck Cooke as "Brünnhilde's Compassionate Love." The theme is especially powerful if we hear it in terms of Brünnhilde's desperate effort to manipulate the orchestra. As discussed above, orchestral control in the world of the *Ring* requires energy; it is not easy. In ex. 10, just before the breakthrough into E major, the orchestra begins to slide back into a restatement of the music heard at the scene's opening. This music recurs in a cyclic



Example 11: Thematic transformation of Leitmotifs in *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3.

fashion throughout the scene, creating a certain centrifugal pull toward E minor. (As in ex. 8 above, Wotan had taken an earlier recurrence and boxed the music into an E-minor cadence.) Now, however, Brünnhilde exerts tremendous effort to overcome an E-minor return. The ascending stepwise anacrusis ("Der diese") beautifully captures her struggle to alter the orchestral direction, as does her sustained E over the subsequent measures. Note also the way her descending leap of a seventh (E to F♯) inverts the characteristic ascending seventh in the orchestral theme. Both leaps draw attention to a sense of physical effort (which is quite literal from a performance perspective).[36] Her command of the orchestra is markedly improving and will continue as the scene progresses.

Wotan, however, reacts in ex. 12 by violently rejecting Brünnhilde's attempt to draw out his compassion. She tries to secure an E-major perfect authentic cadence, but he twists her intended tonic into an augmented harmony (a chord often associated with frustration and anger in Wagner's music).[37] In addition to the harmonic disruption, Wotan coopts Brünnhilde's theme of compassion and reshapes it back into its darker, frustrated version. In terms of form, this moment initiates a sentential construction in which we hear three successive statements, each beginning with augmented triads. Notably, the bass of each initial chord arpeggiates the first of these harmonies (E–C–A♭), which also anticipates the overall harmonic structure of the "Sleep" motive, which will ultimately carry out Wotan's punishment of Brünnhilde. It also deflects the tonality from the solid foundation of E minor/major into more remote realms, eventually settling on A♭ minor (278/2/1). It is as if Wotan, disturbed by Brünnhilde's shift from E minor to E major, decides to take the orchestra in a completely different direction.[38]

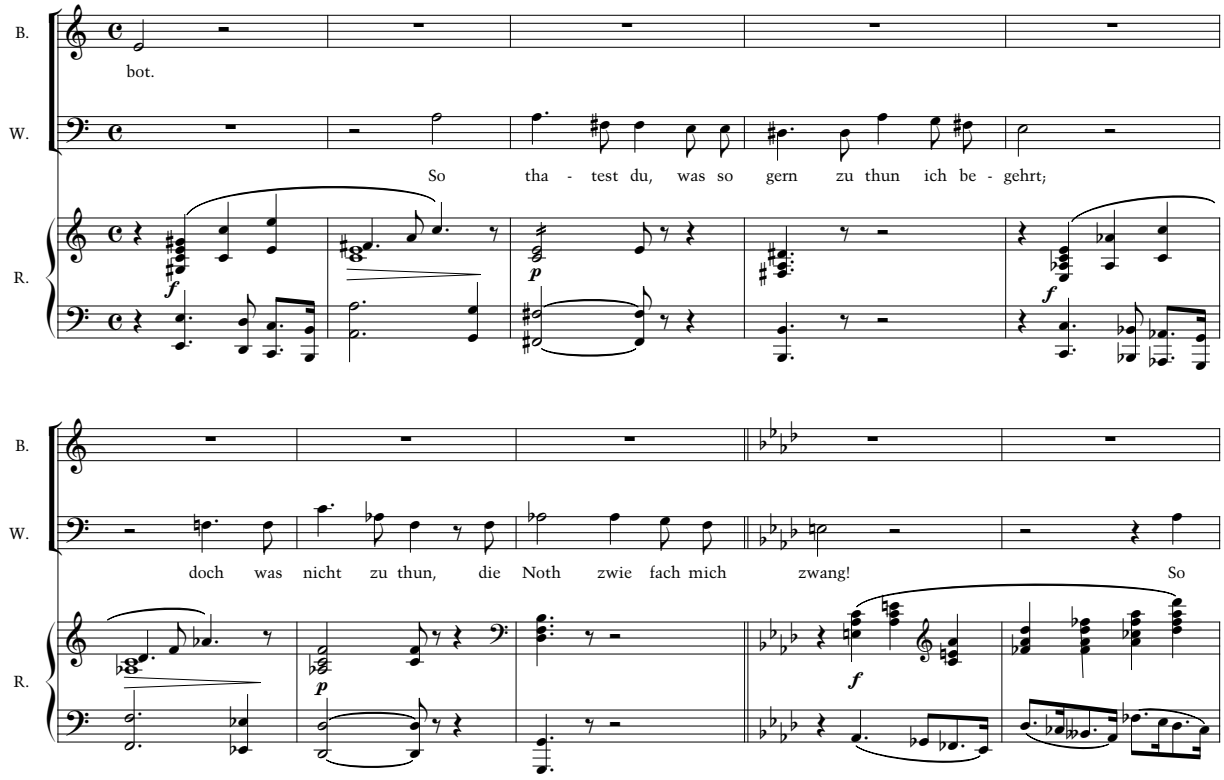
Brünnhilde's response to this is to counter with her own considerable modulations and frenetic motion. She still hasn't given up the possibility of being saved and eventually turns to her boldest, most inflammatory gesture, ex. 13, which she expresses "softly and secretly," according to Wagner's stage directions (*leise mit vertraulicher Heimlichkeit*): she announces the coming birth of Siegfried, calling forth a motive that she herself had "authored," as Abbate puts it, in act III, sc. 1 (p. 226).[39] She sings the theme again in this scene, but it appears with its most complete melodic expression in the orchestra. Brünnhilde unleashes it first in G, then in A, then again in F, but the mere mention of the Volsungs so bothers Wotan that he shatters this last statement with an-

[36]The leap of a seventh seems to have a symbolic function in the *Ring,* which Darcy associates with the power of women. See his "Guides to the Themes of the *Ring*" in the appendix to Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Thematic Development and Dramatic Association in Wagner's* Der Ring des Nibelungen (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2001), p. 341.

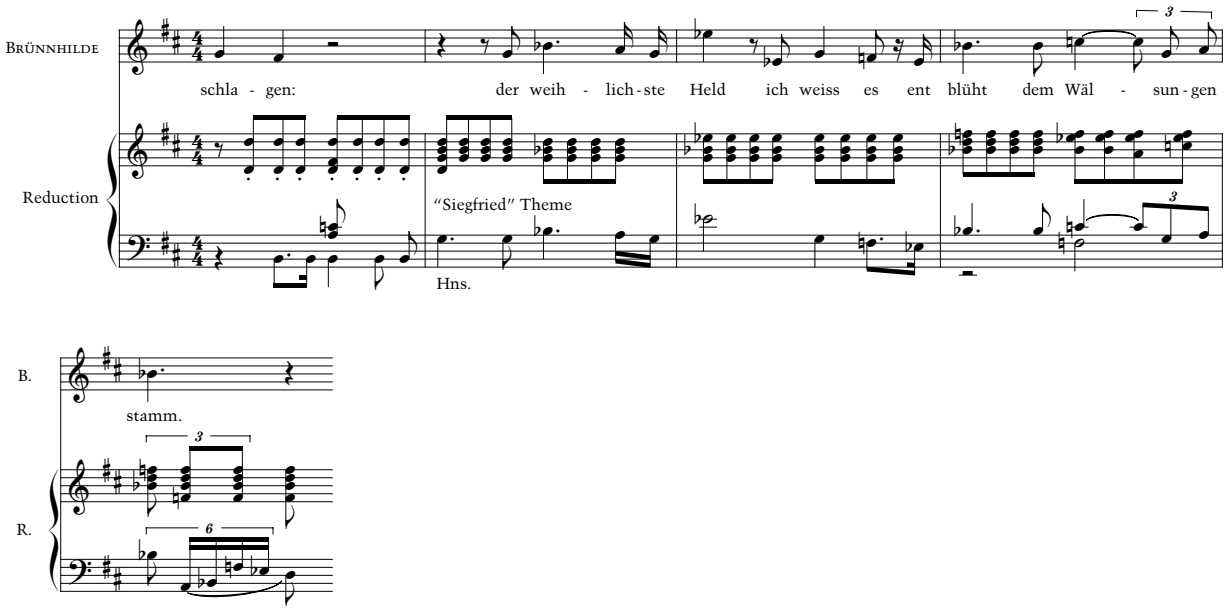
[37]These types of evaded cadences are somewhat of a cliché in Wagner's music, but the fact that they are extraordinarily common does not divest them of dramatic meaning. As is the case here, they are often best understood as part of a larger struggle for orchestral control.

[38]Note also that A♭ minor is a tritone removed from D major, the key that Brünnhilde eventually confirms with her final cadence. Hearing it in terms of its distance from D emphasizes the difficulty of Brünnhilde's overall path toward the D-major cadence.

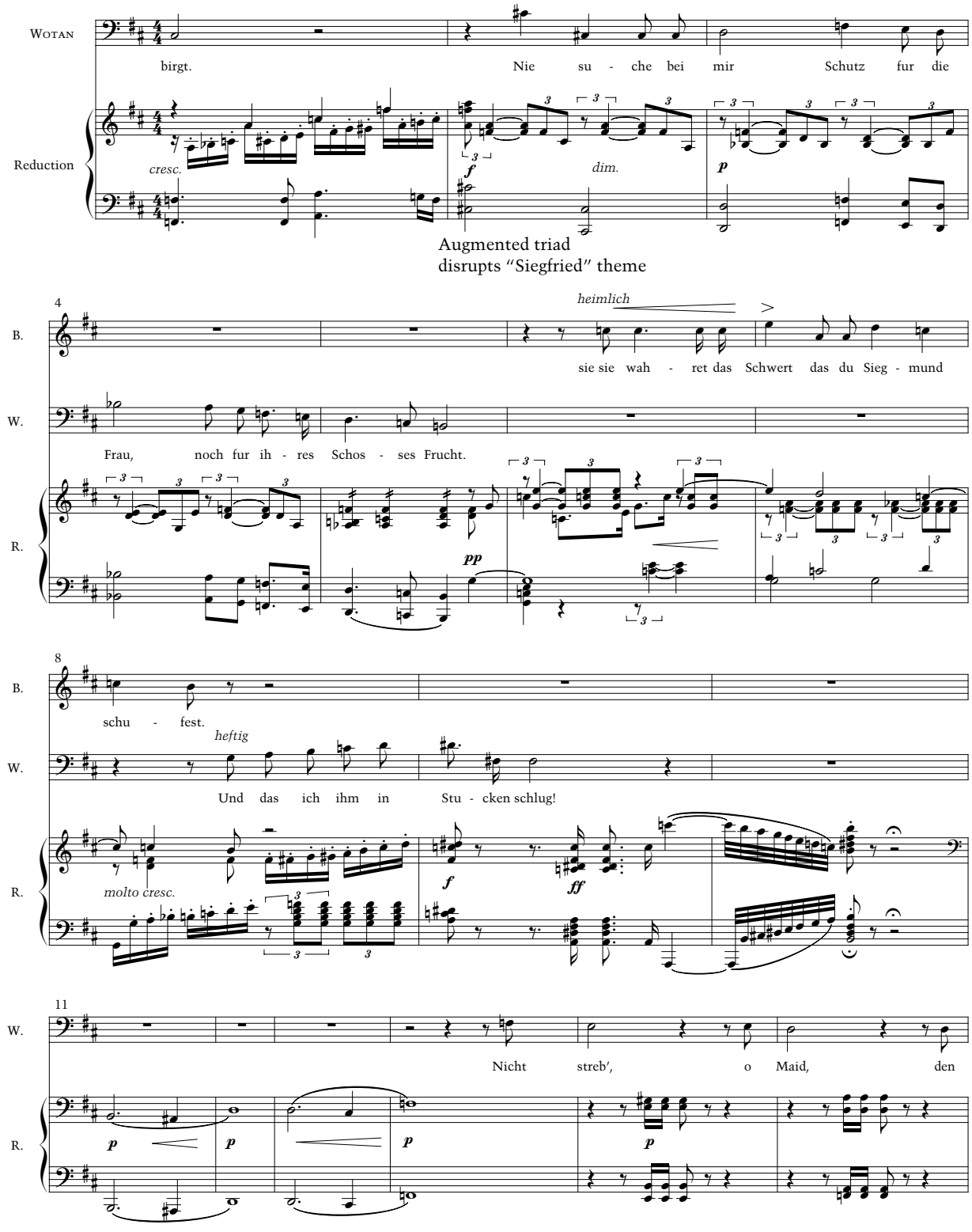
[39]Siegmund sings an embryonic form in act II, sc. 4, p. 168.



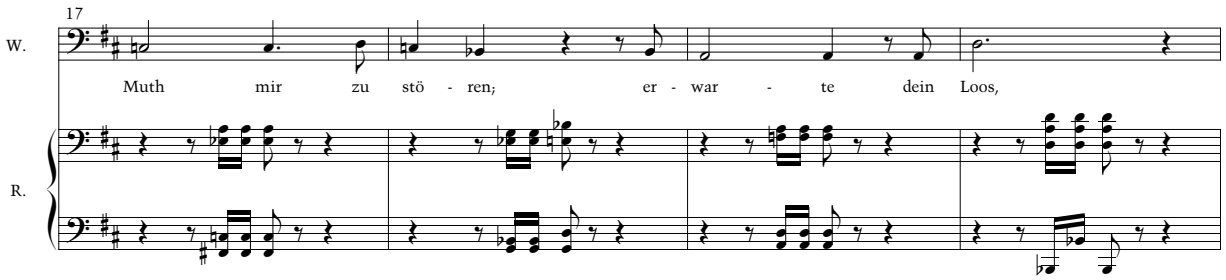
Example 12: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (274/3/4–275/1/3).



Example 13: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (281/3/2–281/4/1).



Example 14: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (282/4/3–283/4/5).



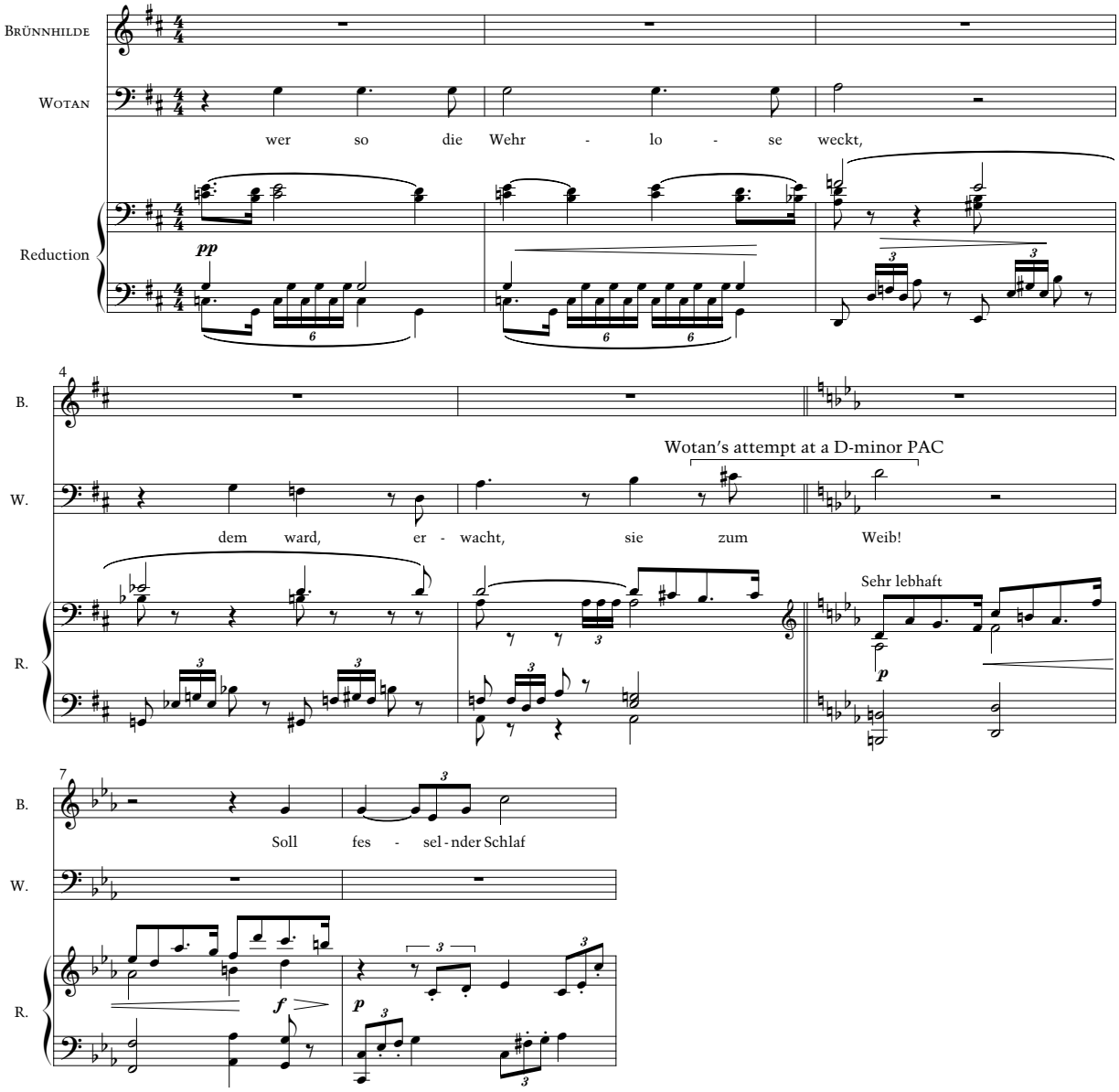
Example 14 (*continued*)

other disruptive augmented triad, destroying the theme's normal continuation (see ex. 14). Somehow unperturbed, Brünnhilde counters by evoking the sword and drawing forth its characteristic C-major motive. This motive, as well as the sword itself, represents Wotan's "große Gedanke" from the end of *Das Rheingold*—the "great idea" that Siegmund could win back the ring—and the reminder of the failure of that idea is more than Wotan can bear. This, along with Brünnhilde's announcements about Siegfried, brings Wotan to the breaking point (see m. 10 of ex. 14). With a sudden explosion of sound, he shuts down the orchestra on the dominant of E minor, reestablishing the atmosphere of the scene's opening, with both a return to the E-minor tonality and an extended silence.

This moment is the turning point in the scene. What follows is both an acknowledgment and a rejection of Brünnhilde's rhetorical aims: "Seek not," Wotan says, "to vanquish my spirit; await now thy fate." Particularly notable is that the orchestra is reduced to small, altered fragments: the passing contours of the "Fate" motive followed by short accompanimental pulses.[40] In other words, Wotan has brought the situation under his control not by creating large swells of orchestral color, but by minimizing the orchestral presence. His resolution is clear. He proceeds to call forth the "Magic Sleep" motive for the first time in preparation for her punishment. As a final gesture—a gesture that would seal Brünnhilde's fate—Wotan attempts a D-minor cadence (see ex. 15). This key is symbolic in that he chooses to close with the key of Siegmund and Sieglinde's sorrow, thereby reaffirming Brünnhilde's similar fate: continuous human suffering. Brünnhilde, however, undermines this gesture in almost exactly the same way Wotan had undermined her earlier attempts at cadence: she undercuts the tonic by reshaping the orchestra into a dissonant, forward-striving harmony (in this case a diminished-seventh chord).[41] This relaunches the music on a new trajectory and toward a new rhetorical goal. Since Brünnhilde isn't able to persuade Wotan to overturn his punishment, she desperately asks for one final request: to be encircled by fire. This final exhortation is expressed somewhat hysterically, but it reveals Brünnhilde's most commanding control of the orchestra in the entire scene, ultimately propelling the music into her final cadence (shown in ex. 4b). When she calls forth the circle of fire, with Loge's characteristic F♯ theme, it is almost surprising that the fire doesn't literally appear onstage. Such is the strength of her final statement. Indeed, her final cadence assures her rhetorical victory: she redirects Wotan's attempt at a D-*minor* cadence and relaunches the music into a D-*major* cadence. The display is so powerful, with its outpouring of strength, energy, and emotion, that

[40]Like most other sections, this one—beginning at m. 11 of ex. 14—opens with a fragment from the opening, but the music is now almost unrecognizable; only these twisted fragments of the "Fate" motive remain.

[41]This diminished-seventh chord temporarily tonicizes C minor, which has deep tonal significance within the cycle. C minor is contrasted with E major at the crux of Wotan's monologue ("das Ende, das Ende!"), and here it initiates the first presentation of the so-called Slumber motive. At the end of the opera, we hear this theme triumphantly in E major, and thus the progression from C minor to E major "reverses" the earlier progression in the monologue from E major to C minor.



Example 15: *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3 (285/2/1–285/3/4).

Wotan, overcome by compassion, cannot help but grant her this final wish. (Wagner's stage description describes Wotan as *überwältig und tief ergriffen*.) Though he still carries forth his basic punishment, her control of the orchestra has won her the possibility for redemption.

Though far from complete, this analysis presents a mode of interpretation that may be profitably applied to all aspects of the scene. It hinges, however, on a way of imagining the orchestra that may not be intuitive for the majority of listeners. It asks us to consider a strange possibility: that the orchestra is actually a transparent physical force within the world of the *Ring*, a sounding substance that not only reacts musically to thoughts, events, and emotions, but is manipulated, molded, and shaped by certain characters. Nevertheless, it reflects a mode of listening that arises in many analytical ac-

counts of Wagner's music, even if not explicitly acknowledged as a specific interpretive stance. This perspective may be adopted for much of Wagner's music, but by proposing such a possibility, I certainly do not intend to exclude other modes of interpretation. This would not only be impossible, but undesirable. After all, there are several passages in Wagner's music that severely strain the fully diegetic perspective, especially when the orchestra takes on a strong proactive role. (To take an obvious example, it is hard to imagine the music of Siegfried's funeral march in the terms outlined above.)[42] Moreover, one of the basic intellectual pleasures that opera affords us is the ability to choose from a multiplicity of interpretations. Such, perhaps, is the obvious and happy result of complex multimedia interaction. Writers like Cone have opened up exciting new avenues of interpretation, but opera as a genre remains uniquely resistant to rigid interpretive schemes. As Ellen Rosand writes in response to Cone's essay "The World of Opera and Its Inhabitants":

> Critics are increasingly at pains to explain operatic conventions, to distinguish one form of expression from another, to define the categories that might afford the intellectual comfort of aesthetic principle. But, as Cone's essay reveals, opera resists such strict analysis. Fully aware of these distinctions, it manipulates and exploits them, all the while aiming to mask them, to enfold them in its realities.[43]

What makes the proposed fully diegetic perspective valuable is not that it offers a comprehensive interpretive approach, but rather that it highlights the dramatic tension in the many "power dialogues" of the *Ring:* situations where one character attempts to exert his or her will over another. This includes many crucial exchanges, for example, that between Wotan and Fricka, Wotan and Alberich, Siegfried and Mime, Wotan and Erda, Siegfried and the Wanderer, and many others.[44] In each case, the onstage drama is heightened when we hear the orchestra not simply as background commentary—an offstage narrator of sorts—but as a sounding reality within the world of Wagner's characters, something they can manipulate for rhetorical purposes. This perspective colors all aspects of the music: keys, chords, timbre, dynamics, rhythm, etc. Under certain conditions, all of these elements bend to the will of a given character. Thus, in Wagner's world, control of the orchestra, like control of the ring itself, becomes a crucial dramatic device.

[42]Passages like these tend to suggest the presence of an outside narrator—whether the orchestra as "Greek chorus," or the composer as an omniscient narrator. In some cases, these perspectives overlap. The prelude to *Das Rheingold*, for instance, can be heard in diegetic terms—the orchestral tissue responds to the flowing water and the balletic swimming of the Rhinedaughters—but it can also be heard as the direct will of the imagined Creator ("Let there be E♭!").

[43]Ellen Rosand, "Operatic Ambiguities and the Power of Music," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4/1 (1992), 75–80, at 80.

[44]Such exchanges often involve an imbalance of power, and the degree of orchestral control becomes a measure of rhetorical skill. The dialogue in act I, sc. 2, of *Siegfried* between Mime and the Wanderer is an excellent case. In that situation, one character (the Wanderer) clearly displays more control than the other (Mime).

Abstract.
This article examines the degree to which characters in Wagner's *Ring* might be heard to control the orchestra for specific rhetorical purposes. Using Edward Cone's work as a starting point, I adopt a "fully diegetic" perspective in which music is understood as a physical presence in the *Ring,* a continuous tissue of sound that can be altered, shaped, and recreated according to a given character's conscious or unconscious intentions. An analysis of *Die Walküre,* act III, sc. 3, clarifies the approach.
Keywords: Wagner, orchestra, diegetic, *Die Walküre,* Cone.