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FANTASY, GEOGRAPHY, WAGNER, AND OPERA*

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ABSTRACT. Wilhelm Richard Wagner fused fantasy based on epic and lore with seamless scores, using landscapes and urban images to forge spatial order on stage. As a footloose composer-conductor, Wagner was considered a globetrotter for his time, and from trans-European tours he drew inspiration for numerous stagings. Nine of his operas have rustic pastoral settings, with actors silhouetted against geological formations, forests, vistas of undulating terrain for pilgrimages, or raging seas, all visually believable scenery. *Rienzi* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* are urban in setting, whereas *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot* are set in a castle-like format. *Keywords: aesthetics, landscape, opera, Wilhelm Richard Wagner.*

> *The longing, stimuli and pains which are expressed in the lyric of Baudelaire and the music of Wagner are not for the worldly sentiments of the rustic villager, but exclusively for the metropolitan intellectual.*
>
> —Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes,* 1923

The operas of Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813–1883) offer an opportunity to explore the physical staging of a distinguished operatic tradition and the extent to which this staging was based on the composer's geographical knowledge, experience, and observations.[1] Wagner epitomizes the romantic era of opera, but he manipulates the physical world to create lifelike settings. If operas of that era embraced certain art forms, the modern period is marked by a more abstract conceptualization of the world, avowedly contemporary in response and with an overarching perspective. Wagner's on-stage fusing of fantasy and myth with geographical reality reflects his imagination, with flashbacks to sceneries he observed firsthand on extensive hikes and travels. He invested much effort onstage to re-creating past environments echoing a visionary reality. In this effort and approach, he achieved *Gesamtkunstwerk,* an aesthetic unity that enhanced the whole of the presentation.

How did Wagner gain a sense of diverse landscapes? He studied geography in no formal sense understandable now. As a teenager, however, he began to hike and wan-

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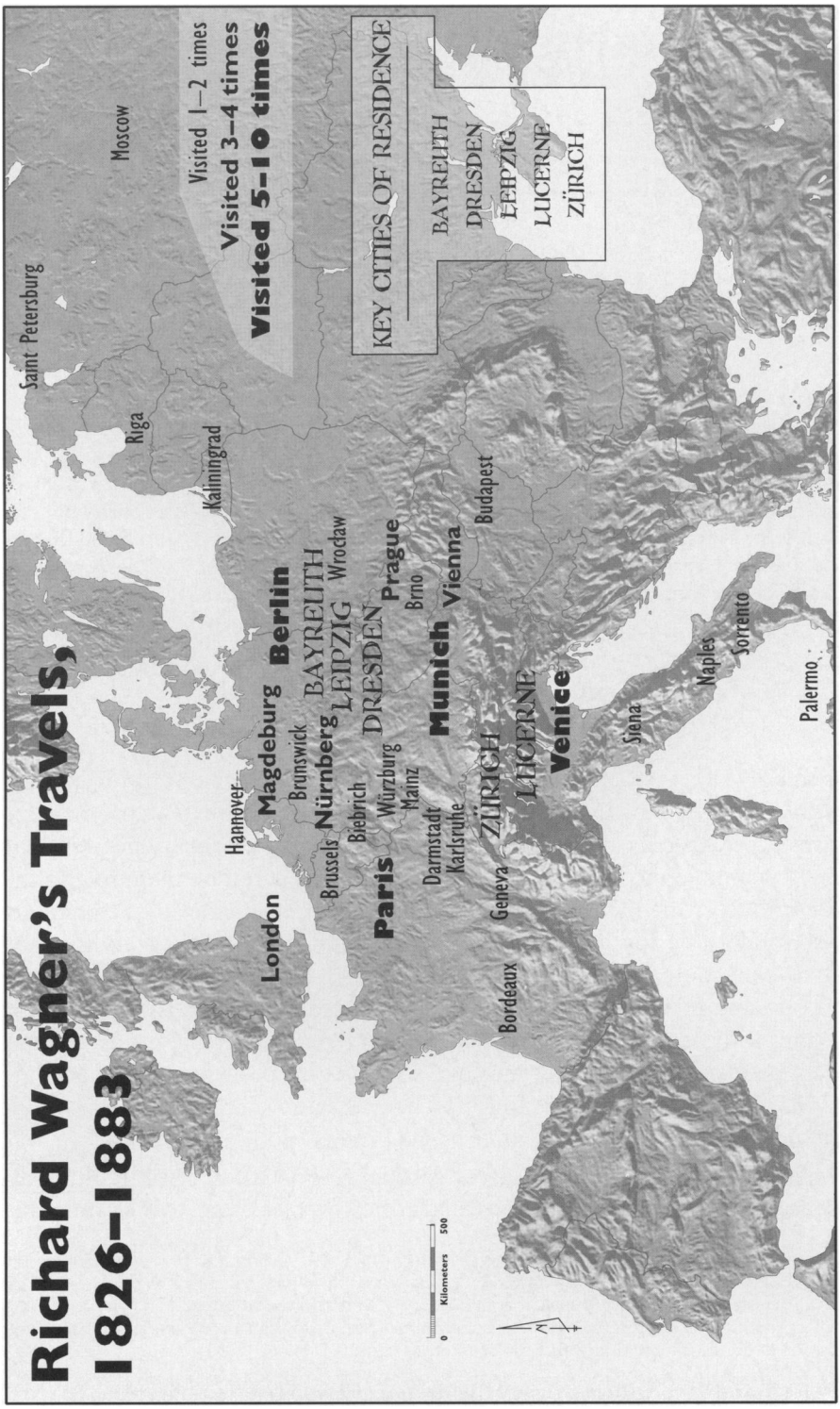

FIG. 1—Richard Wagner traveled widely and often between 1826 and 1883, especially in Italy, Austria, France, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland. (Cartography by the University of Nevada Mapping Facility)

der widely, and his travels expanded after he assumed positions as conductor or choirmaster in Magdeburg, Würzburg, and Riga (Figures 1 and 2). The use of natural settings in his operas was extensive, especially as compared with such distinguished opera composers as Mozart, Rossini, or Verdi, all of whom also traveled. Wagner was extraordinarily aware of the environment, as is especially evident in *Der*

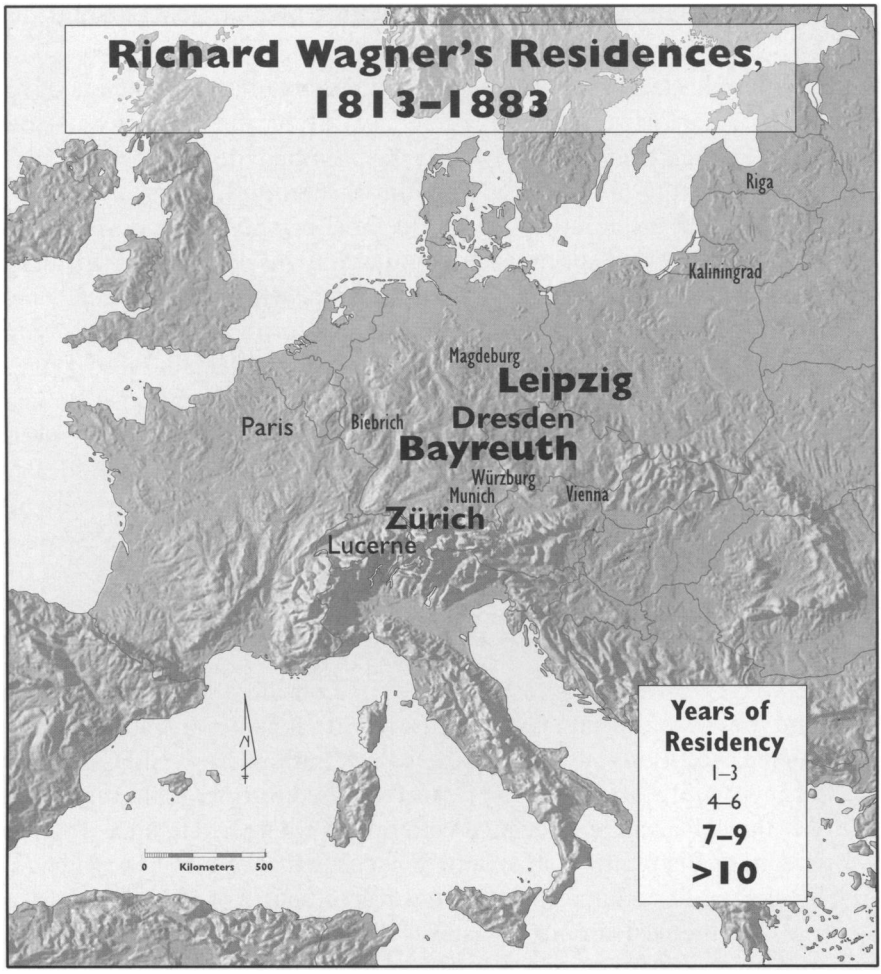

FIG. 2—Unlike composers such as Verdi, Wagner moved frequently. The "center of gravity" of his residences remained southeastern Germany, and he ultimately came to rest in Bayreuth. (Cartography by the University of Nevada Mapping Facility)

Ring des Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelung). Journeys gave Wagner time and the experience to internalize diverse landscapes and their respective aesthetic attributes; the impressions translated into well-composed images that emerged in opera stagings. Furthermore, rustic settings created for operas aptly matched the mythological epics that were his subject, complementing the oral and visual spectacle on stage. His

sense of the aesthetic in music took the place of landscape as later interpreted and embraced by twentieth-century geographers.

Wagner took license to blend folk mythology with landscapes of his nineteenth century. The sagas and epics were dated, though how much was known of past environments at the time of his writing is uncertain. German audiences of his day were attuned to nature and rural settings, and Wagner's stage instructions conformed in good measure to a natural and rural world with which audiences could readily identify.

On the operatic stage Wagner created a remarkable interrelatedness of music and geography. As an artist he was unfettered by the conventions of what—then or now—would be considered good geography; he plumbed the geography of his own imagination, projecting his works against the background of the mythical landscapes that inhabited his librettos. He had to shoehorn his works onto stages that lacked the grandiosity and spaciousness required by his operas for truly effective presentations. Nine of his operas have rustic pastoral settings with visually believable scenery, in which actors are silhouetted against formidable geological formations, forests, or raging seas (Figures 3–5). In other words, Wagner fused geography and stage planning to provide the needed dramatic visual composition against which to structure his literary and musical works and create Gesamtkunstwerk—a term he would later abandon. He borrowed his concepts from Greek ideals that merged the separate arts and the players, which led to the bonding of art and public. Thomas Grey refers to *Der Ring,* which gave rise to Wagner's viewing the work, for a time, as a "stage festival play" (Grey 1992, 232).

Geography and Music

Geographers have given only modest—and recent—consideration to the massive role that various types of music have played in the world's societies and cultures. Prominent among the exceptions are Peter Nash (1968, 1975, 1994; Nash and Carney 1996), George Carney (1994), Larry Ford (1971), and Manfred Büttner (Büttner, Schnabel, and Winkler 1991). Places are associated with music; whether reference is to Woodstock, Branson, or Bayreuth, each locality is identified with a specific music style, drawing focused audiences in response to musical presentations. Furthermore, such events carry with them sociopolitical aspects that open vistas onto the geopolitical consequences of such happenings.[2] Music can serve as protest, further a cause, enhance a belief system, or profit an ideological agenda. Matters turn even more complex when detailed attention is directed to instruments, which tend to have cultural and regional associations, as does the balalaika with Russia, the marimba with the Caribbean and Central American culture areas, and the lute with Southwest Asia.

Classical music is recognizably part of cultural geography and carries both aesthetic and demographic import. Audience numbers, audience education, audience consensus, audience cultural preferences, and audience knowledge shape the diffusion and following of classical music. Two events of a few years ago suggest the level of its acceptance and diffusion. In the first, a group of Japanese tourists in a London

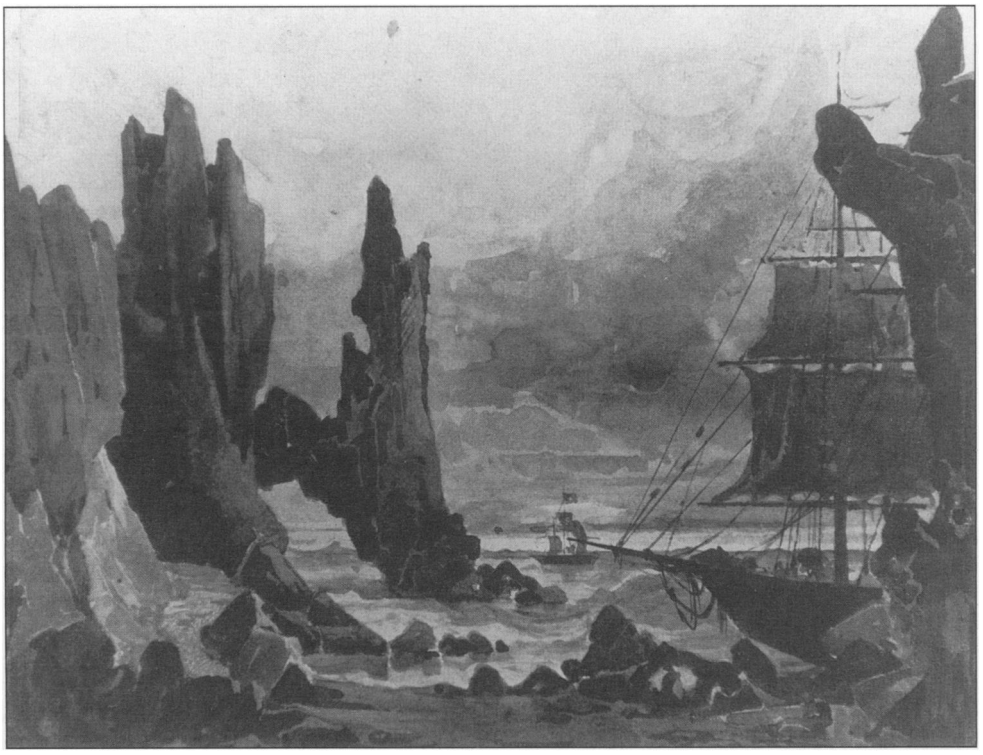

FIG. 3—Scene 1 of *Der fliegende Holländer,* as presented in the Teatro Communale in Bologna on 20 November 1877, portrays a safe cove. The force of the sea contrasts with that of the geological formations, befitting the gloomy mood of the music. Tito Azolini, the staging artist, captured Wagner's conception of harmonizing the aural with the visual. *Source:* Bauer 1983, 42.

hotel at dinnertime on Christmas Eve of 1989 intoned not a Japanese folk song but the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The participation level was most impressive. Second, musical performances at the inauguration of the Shanghai Hilton in 1988 were overtures and symphonic selections by Berlioz, Beethoven, and Schumann, not songs from the Chinese canon. The orchestra members wore black suits or tuxedos and black bow ties.

Why classical music is underrepresented in cultural geography is difficult to explain. Classical music is part of the humanistic study arena and is unencumbered by the immediate critical social changes that shape, in part, research agendas in the physical and social sciences. The long-standing omission of classical music from cultural geography has kept important intellectual windows closed for far too long. As an element of cultural geography, classical music makes possible the appraisal of larger questions, as with interpreting the landscapes of artistic imagination. There is an aesthetic realm of deeper emotion and "classicism" itself that is profoundly humanistic—and more accessible than in studies of popular or folk music.

Humanism is particularly important in opera. Aside from the artistic creations and their potential geographical attributes, the structures that dot the cultural land-

FIG. 4—Act 3 of *Tannhäuser,* as presented at the Court Theater in Dresden in 1847. This setting captures Wagner's emphasis on the landscape at the foot of the Wartburg and provides a visual link between the audience and the pilgrims. *Source:* Bauer 1983, 64.

scapes for performances of these works have gone unnoticed in cultural geography in general. Classical music provides a very large window onto societies and their arranging of landscapes to serve cultural aspirations. Opera houses are inescapably part of the cultural landscape; furthermore, stylistically they inform us about the aesthetic sensibilities of their designers and patrons. They speak to urban culture and audience size and to the contexts of audience knowledge and preference. Opera-house locations reflect the spatial order of select societies. Consider the role of opera in the boomtowns of the American West, or the remarkable obsession of the "Irishman" in Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo,* whose goal is to build an opera house in Iquitos, Peru.

Cultural geographers read how artifacts shape the human landscape mosaics that societies assemble. Opera and opera houses provide insights into eras in which they were composed and built: Text, narrative, and structure provide a larger time frame. The artist uses time transposition to fit artwork into the contemporary time mold of a chosen creative period. Wagner sallied back and forth in his major works, with themes of a bygone era and an environment that could be understood in the nineteenth century.

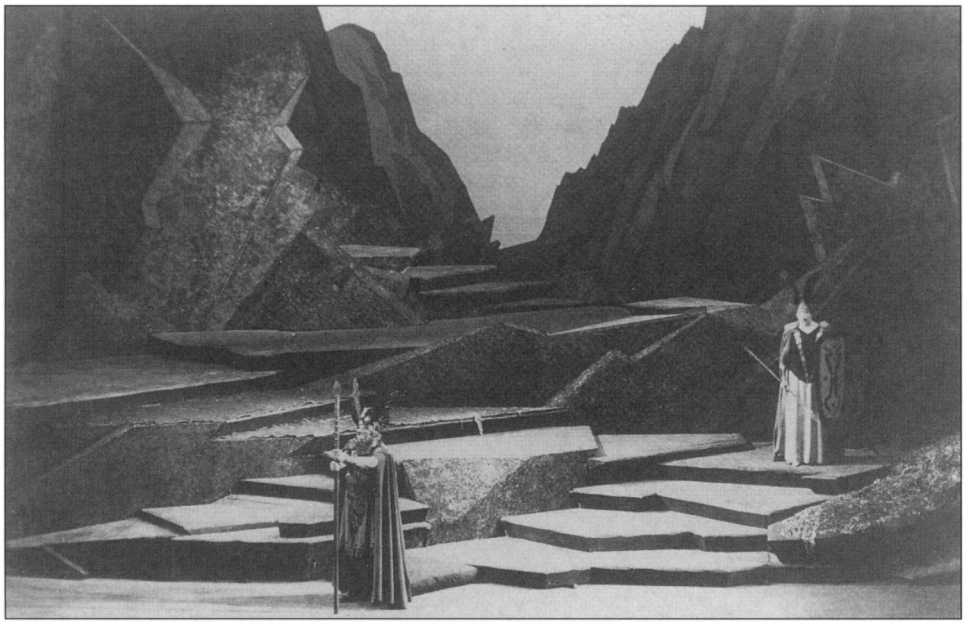

FIG. 5—In Herbert Graf's 1948 production of *Die Walküre* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, a mountain gorge suggested the power of the physical environment in act 2. This stage setting was far starker than that of the 1876 production by Joseph Hoffman. *Source:* Bauer 1983, 218.

WAGNER THE TRAVELER

Wagner was an observant traveler. Mozart, Verdi, and Rossini also traveled extensively to present their operas in major cities in Europe, and acceptance of their works, as with Wagner's, spread across the European cultural landscape. Each composer had a specific regional presence. Mozart's region centered on Salzburg and radiated to Vienna and Munich. Verdi's was the triangle formed by Milan, Paris, and Genoa, with Naples and Rome of lesser significance. Wagner led a more harried economic and complicated artistic existence, mirrored in his extensive travels and his residences of varied length (Figures 1 and 2).

Whereas Verdi journeyed in response to invitations, Wagner presented himself out of necessity in the various European culture centers. Between 1813 and 1830 he moved in the triangle formed by Leipzig, Dresden, and Prague. In the context of its time and the means of transportation available, those were notable distances, each leg taking two to three days to cover by carriage.

As an adolescent Wagner acquired an inclination for wandering in the region now known as the Bohemian Middle Mountains, mostly in the area of Děčín. On these hikes he developed a landscape aesthetic that was to shape stage scenery in his later artistic works. He made nature part of his art by fitting the geographical milieu into his creations. His travel sufferings prompted him to insist on fidelity for his stage settings. The settings for *Der fliegende Holländer* (The Flying Dutchman) and *Tannhäuser* reflect his travel experiences most vividly and directly (Figures 3 and 4).

In 1839 Wagner and his first wife, Minna, boarded the oceangoing *Thetis* in Baltiysk, destination London. The seas in the Skagerrak reached such turbulence that an ill end seemed at hand. The captain eventually steered the vessel into a Norwegian fjord, where it spent the next two days at anchor while the passengers and crew recovered from the savaging of the sea. Wagner was not averse to receiving inspiration from uncomfortable settings: Torments akin to those experienced aboard the *Thetis* appeared on his stage. And this pattern holds for at least nine of his thirteen extant operas.

Hiking and the rigors of travel consumed much of Wagner's time and energies (Figure 1). At an early age he traveled extensively in Saxony, Bohemia, and Czechoslovakia. Later travels took him to Magdeburg, Bayreuth, Nürnberg, Würzburg, and Frankfurt am Main. These were carriage trips for professional ends. Journeys to Berlin, Kaliningrad, Munich, and Riga followed. A Kaliningrad-to-Paris carriage trip projected in 1839 turned into the boat journey on the *Thetis,* which became the stage setting for *Holländer.* Similarly, an 1842 Paris-to-Dresden carriage trip of five days inspired Wagner to create stage settings for *Tannhäuser.*

Wagner's carefully recorded mobility makes it possible to identify select reference points that clarify the magnitude and extent of his peripatetic life, especially between 1839 and 1864. Financial straits extended his travels throughout much of Europe: He visited Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Paris, Vienna, Budapest, Berlin, London, Milan, Venice, and Palermo well before railroads were in place. The amount of time he spent observing landscape characteristics in aesthetic perspective could be considered excessive when the means of travel are rated for their efficiency. This condition did not change substantially in his post-1864 journeys: Traveling continued to provide scenic inspirations for his works, as the cathedral in Siena, Tuscany, did for *Parsifal.*

During his twenties and thirties Wagner traveled in order to fill positions as a conductor or concertmaster. After 1860 his poetic prose gave way increasingly to composition and to seeing to it that his operas became part of the repertoire in Europe. He sought to effect a return on his artistic work, one that would also relieve his lack of funds. The period between 1860 and 1864 was especially difficult: Desperate, Wagner turned frenetically footloose in pursuit of financial viability. When Ludwig II of Bavaria became his patron in 1864, Wagner attained a level of financial security that ended his Brownian motion. This coincides with the time when he lived in Biebrich, a base from which he hiked into the surrounding countrysides to visit historic castles and fortresses, reveling in the scenic landscapes of the Rhine Valley. This experience may have shaped the naturalistic landscape scenes he detailed in the libretto and score for *Der Ring* (Figure 2) (Wagner 1994, 867). Wagner had planned to settle in Biebrich and build a home there once his finances were in order. He sought to trade his itinerant life for a settled one and use the time for writing and composition. Before Ludwig II's secretary, Pfistermeister, finally met with Wagner on 4 May 1864, he spent a financially hectic year: "My life was to have no more of these alarms; . . . I was never again to feel the weight of the everyday hardships of existence" (1994, 887).

Wagner's Work on Stage and Geography

From carriage to stage is a journey from reality to fantasy. Opera composers generally adapted literary works that suited their idea of dramatic content. Librettists tailored texts that met the opera composer's specific requirements. Wagner was his own librettist. He also was explicit about stage setting, scenery, and place. He engaged specific artists to refine his sketches into paintings or props that projected landscapes compatible with the myth and action on stage. Actors were placed on stage to reflect an aesthetic coordination of setting and action. Wagner's perception of space was surely guided by artistic and aesthetic considerations, never the spatial order commonly presented by geographers—German or otherwise. Yet he had to consider space on stage if his work was to gain recognition. An added problem for Wagner was the sheer magnitude of his productions, which had to be compressed to fit on the operatic stage.

A good overview of the totality of opera is provided by means of a model. Both as art form and as audience-dependent entertainment, opera is a space-dependent activity. The artist uses areal relationships to provide a stage on which to present his or her creation. Audience participation depends and draws on knowledge, preference, culture, and information circulation systems. Moreover, economic elements tend to influence the intensity of audience participation, which shapes the dynamics of the desire lines. Opera is ultimately also dependent on action. Art cannot exist in isolation. It must be exposed to audiences. This necessitates a focal location and select communication instruments: newspapers, billboards, posters, radio, television, word of mouth. Art is public and communal, and its exposure involves spatial placement. Opera is a particular art form that is space dependent and as such has attributes identifiable with diverse societies. This convergence of art and geography is realistic in its existence but embryonic in consideration. The choice of opera and those of one composer reflects the nomothetic attribute inherent in music. Recent experience underscores the universal character of art, as I observed in the *Ring* cycle performance at the 1996–1997 New York Metropolitan Opera season: The composite audience mirrored the continents. Centripetal forces structure desire, the lines that galvanize audiences to gather in certain spots for performances.

Of the thirteen extant Wagner librettos, four have urban castle or palace settings, one is set in rustic, if humanized, landscapes and on the foredeck of a ship, and the remaining eight depend on the settings in an essentially untrammeled nature: mountains, forests, or expansive floodplains (Figure 6). Wagner's imaging of nature led to stage models that realized his artistic fantasy. Whether Wagner is classified as a pseudonaturalist or as a philosophical environmentalist weighs less in this context than does his insistence on giving physical environmental settings a comprehensive presence on stage. In *Holländer,* with its evocation of the forces of nature, the sea itself sensitized the composer to the mood in which the Dutch lived. Depictions of the early stagings of *Holländer* show Wagner's emphasis on the natural milieu (Figure 3). In *Tristan und Isolde* the first act is set on a ship's deck, and the second act takes place

FIG. 6—Wagner based the locations of his plots on theme sites rather than on contemporary national identities, as is best exemplified in *Tristan und Isolde.* His search for source materials that were consistent with his aesthetic images and for themes that fitted his artistic bias was wide ranging. (Cartography by the University of Nevada Mapping Facility)

in a park with large, moonlight-suffused trees that provide an ambiance suitable for a lovers' rendezvous (Figure 7). Wagner created the music and with it a mood he wanted on stage in order to direct the audience's response to the Gesamtkunstwerk. For the staging of *Lohengrin* he sought a "naive simplicity" to correspond with tenth-century civilizations and landscape (Kapp 1914, 196; Bauer 1983, 113).

Wagner sought landscape images to play on the environmental preconceptions of his audiences, complementing music and myth, and he used imagination and preconception instead of science to match environments with landscapes in the librettos. An example from his pen for *Tannhäuser* illustrates what he planned to evoke on stage. His instructions are detailed and specific:

FIG. 7—The rendezvous in act 2, scene 2 of *Tristan und Isolde.* A bucolic setting in a large park points to the natural spontaneity of the moment. The massive trees suggest a humanly comfortable landscape, blending the natural realm with social circumstance. *Source:* Petzet and Petzet 1970, plate 65.

An inviting valley at the base of the Wartburg [castle].[3]

a. Backdrop perspective with the Hörselberg [a mountain ridge].
b. Large, movable scenery for the entire stage; right above is the Wartburg.
c. Movable landscape scenery, and behind it an open space as if the path leads into the valley.
d. A hill path from the Wartburg downward leading from the 6th prop into the 5th prop. The dotted line marks the path of the pilgrims.
e. The same slightly lower, from the 3rd prop leading into the 2nd prop.
f. Portrait of the Holy Mother under an aged oak.
g. Forest ravine, through which passes the landgrave [a twelfth-century royal administrator, or lord, of a large estate] with his entourage, with appearances at the 5th and 4th props.
h. Rock fragment below a pine for the young shepherd.
i. Apareille [a narrow stone path; also a stage access] that one reaches through the forest ravine, to the 3rd prop and from there descends to the stage.
j. Apareille that is used for the first time in the 3rd act.

The red dotted line originating out of the 1st prop points right to the depression "c" behind; it identifies the path for the returning pilgrims in the 3rd act. (Petzet and Petzet 1970, 114)[4]

These are landscape creations that correspond to a composer's finely wrought, if imaginary, landscape library.

Fragmented rock formations form much of the scenic background for *Die Walküre* (The Valkyrie) (Figure 5). Here the question arises as to the extent to which hikes in the Swiss mountains influenced Wagner's perceptions in shaping the staged scenery (Wagner 1994, 583). The inclusion of thunderstorms in the three acts points to Wagner's devotion to nature and its varied forces. The newspaper *Die Süddeutsche Presse* reported on the staging of *Der Ring*: "It is a splendor, a brilliance, an achievement which appeared unattainable until now" (quoted in Petzet and Petzet 1970, 213).[5] Even the living room in the first act of *Die Walküre* is built around a large tree, with roots covering the floor. Although Wagner sought a return to an unknowable time, he strove for artistic integrity. In the 1976 Bayreuth staging of *Der Ring* by Patrice Chereau, *Das Rheingold* (The Rhinegold) is set in the Rhine Valley. And each opera of the *Der Ring* cycle would also include careful staging requirements. For *Holländer,* Wagner's original instructions read:

> The sea occupies the major portion of the stage: a large perspective for the same. The cliffs in the foreground on both sides form a gorge from which the echoes resound. Dark weather, a heavy storm; between the cliffs the wind loses its power, while on the open sea the waves are roiled to great heights; from time to time the howling sounds of the storm penetrate. Darland's boat just dropped anchor very close to shore. (Wagner 1914, 3: 111)

These instructions reflect not a bookish acquaintance with the elements but instead the raw reality of Wagner's 1839 voyage aboard the *Thetis.* How does *Tannhäuser* look after the curtain rises?

> Act I, scene 3: Tannhäuser, who has not left his position, finds himself suddenly transposed into a beautiful valley. Blue sky, bright sunshine, to the right the Wartburg placed in the background, and at a greater distance to the left is the Hörselberg. On the right, a mountain path leads to the halfway mark of the summit, which is placed in the foreground, from which it then turns laterally; in the same foreground is a Madonna figure, to which a low mountain ledge provides access. (Wagner 1914, 3: 163)
>
> Act III: A valley fronting the Wartburg, to the left the Hörselberg in fall colors; it is dusk. (Wagner 1914, 3: 180)

The instructions for *Lohengrin* are no less place-specific:

> Act I: A meadow in the floodplain of the Schelde River near Antwerp [Brabant]. The river in the background curves, which allows a few trees to interrupt the view of the river, which becomes visible again at a great distance.
>
> Scene 1: In the foreground King Henry sits under a massive old oak; next to him stand Saxonian and Thuringian counts, noblemen and hangers-on which form the king's coterie. (Wagner 1914, 3: 198)

The opening scene in act 1 of *Das Rheingold* proffers an additional glimpse of how Wagner used geography to impart a sense of reality to his stagecraft:

> Greenish dusk, upward lighter, downward darker. The upper section is filled with upwelling water, which flows restlessly from right to the left. Toward the lower strata the flood-tide dissolves in a progressively finer fog, making the room at a man's height from the floor up appear to be free of water, which flows as if in clouds above the nocturnal ground. Everywhere ledges of angular rock formations emerge out of the depths and delimit the extent of the stage; the entire ground is fragmented into wildly peaked rock formations; hence there is nowhere a near-plane surface, and every direction in this darkness suggests deeper canyons. (Wagner 1914, 4: 15)

The debate over staging operas offers points that generate diverse interpretations. Allan Kozinn, for example, states that: "Ever since the Metropolitan Opera introduced its grandly Romantic, naturalistic staging of *Die Walküre* a decade ago—with the other *Der Ring* operas quickly following—some have praised the company for having the sense to stage the work on Wagner's own terms, and others have derided it for lacking the imagination and fortitude to offer a fresh approach" (Kozinn 1996, 11).

Tradition and contemporaneity present a curious juxtaposition. For obvious reasons no one questions maintaining the integrity of a score, but a stage setting is expected to migrate and evolve with changing times and to reflect the shifting tastes of audiences.[6] Andreas Kluge writes that in the first post–World War II performance of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth, in 1951, some of the audience must have thought they had witnessed an optical illusion, a nightmare on an empty stage (1993). What had happened to all the stage props from the good old days? *Parsifal* was performed with few changes from its premiere in 1882 in Bayreuth until 1933. Kluge suggests that such avoidance of change "would mean turning the virtue of fidelity into the vice of fossilization" (p. 18). Wagner's instructions for staging the work were clear; they had functional and artistic merit and context but could readily be modified to satisfy contemporary aesthetic perceptions. The idea of modernizing the stage scenery for Wagner's operas at the end of the twentieth century introduces artistic and aesthetic inconsistencies that may distract audiences. Moreover, myths are in some essential ways unalterable, as are scores. The only changes that are readily available are in the setting and the staging. Vision and thought have to be in harmony for the event to be memorable; otherwise, a listener is better off staying home and listening to a recorded performance.

Wagner created a spatial order based on myth and fantasy. He grappled with the orderly arrangement of human action in space in order to harmonize the aural with the visual action and to impart plausibility and understanding in order to ensure the audience's acceptance and support. Similarly, in the real world of the marketplace, producers of goods and services must both attract and hold customers if they wish to remain economically viable. In the twentieth century several of Wagner's works, especially *Die Feen* (The Fairies), *Das Liebesverbot* (The Ban on Love), and the once very popular *Rienzi,* have been staged less often.[7]

A brief review of the locations of the Wagner operas allows a fuller appreciation for their setting on stage (Figure 6). *Die Feen* is a fantasy, and Wagner gave no clues

about where the action takes place. A king of mythical Tramond, Arindal, is the key figure. The work is based on the romance *La donna serpente* (The Female Snake), by Carlo Gozzi. *Das Liebesverbot,* borrowed from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure,* is set in Palermo, a major crossroad and the capital of Sicily. Wagner visited the city, but not until long after he had composed the opera (Figure 1). *Rienzi* is based on a major novel about a noble Roman by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Set in Rome and with five acts, its staging is complex and costly. The saga of *Holländer* is staged on the shore of southern Norway's fjord area. Here sharply carved terrain provides a smallish, nestled port scene. Commentators have identified the place as Sandwike, a fishing community.

Tannhäuser was based on the fairy tales of Ludwig Tieck, although Wagner synthesized the work based on thirteenth-century Thuringia, as he first envisioned the setting during his return to Dresden from Paris in 1842. Without reconstructing a landscape as it might have been some 600 years earlier, Gottfried Pfeiffer provides a view of how landscapes were modified in this part of Central Europe (1956, 244–277). Artistic license imbued the stage setting for the Venusberg with a soft, pink lighting, a departure from what Wagner had witnessed in 1842. And the Rhine Valley at no point matches the physical environment of Iceland or the 1200s.

Neither the constraints of location nor those of vegetation barred Wagner from using local scenery as background for *Der Ring.* The music was designed to create moods that reverberated in the landscape and harmonized into an emotional totality. Toward that end, Wagner made voices themselves into scenery; he used orchestral passages for scenic mood emphasis between vocal parts—another example of his Gesamtkunstwerk. And for *Lohengrin,* one of his three romantic operas, Wagner had visualized tenth-century Antwerp and the castle as being in one location, but a visit there after the opera was completed showed that the actual spatial order differed from his text: The river, the castle, and an oak tree are key reference points and condense the reality onto the stage.

Der Ring is set near where Wagner once resided, in Biebrich, toward the middle of the Rhine Valley. From long, local hikes he knew the lay of the land before he scripted the scores for his tetralogy. All four operas are set in the Bingen-Biebrich-Mainz area, which is dotted with castles, fortresses, and notable rock formations. Shaped by weathering and water erosion, these formations include river bluffs, steep escarpments, and floodplains that vary significantly in width. The artist–environment link is unmistakable in the stage scenery of Wagner's major operas.

Music, Politics, and Diffusion

In the world of music, politics and diffusion may at first seem to be of little import, but the three are closely associated, especially because politics influences how music spreads. Politics and diffusion affect religious music, popular song (Carney 1994), and the music of protest (Kong 1995), to mention just a few types of music. Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Woodstock, New York, come readily to mind in considering the popularization of political-protest songs. Even operas are influenced: They are extremely expensive to produce, and their staging and diffusion are affected

by personal relationships, musical styles, ideological orientation, and competitive stratagems. Wagner's dependence on benefactors who were willing and able to pay for the massive, costly performances, of three to six hours' duration, limited his ability to be politically outspoken.

Although Wagner undoubtedly suffered artistic indignities, he was not above inconsideration himself. To have major works staged, especially large and untested works like Wagner's, calls for the marshaling of massive resources. Without a generous benefactor, breaking into an established repertoire requires special ties. Moreover, if one's personality is abrasive enough to provoke peers, a work can suffer substantial delays or total rejection, as Wagner's experience reveals.

Eduard Devrient, who served as director of the Karlsruhe Court theater, for years frustrated performances of Wagner's works at the Baden Court, whose duke and duchess were otherwise Wagner admirers. Devrient had initiated Wagner's coming to Karlsruhe, but toward the end of 1859 he turned vehemently against the performance of any of Wagner's works there (Wagner 1983, 595). Wagner's concern was palpable when he returned to Karlsruhe in mid-1861 and reported to the grand duke of Baden that he could not find the needed artists for the performances of his works in Karlsruhe. Devrient received this news with "undisguised satisfaction" (p. 646). Wagner recognized the hopelessness of his situation by August 1861, when he petitioned the grand duke to grant him a refuge near Karlsruhe plus a yearly pension equivalent to a modern U.S.$16,300. The request was denied on the grounds that he soon would be meddling in the affairs of the theater and would become "embroiled with its director, E. Devrient" (p. 661).

Wagner compounded his difficulties by insisting on terms and conditions that were logical for him but unacceptable to others. If accepted, they could have opened doors to new performances of Wagner's operas—which he desperately needed. For a time the grand duke of Weimar sought to take possession of *Der Ring*, but he bowed out when discussion turned to the financial terms (Wagner 1983, 546, 550).[8]

Between 1849 and 1862, when Wagner was exiled from the German states,[9] he had no influence over how his operas were staged. To improve the prospects for a faithful presentation, he instructed potential stage directors to follow his meticulous instructions about how to present his operas. The prose and cant of these instructions was stern, demanding, and condescending. Arrogance and presumption in such detailed directions worked against both Wagner's long-term interests and his short-term financial needs. Events and fame may have vindicated his vision and artistic accounts, but he was down at the time and nearly out, and his directors decided that they sat in the cockpit. This experience contributed to Wagner's inspiration to plan and build an opera house, an idea that came to fruition in Bayreuth, where he could oversee the construction of the house and home for his operas. It is today the seat of the annual Bayreuth festivals, where not a single note of music by any composer other than Wagner has been heard.

European cognoscenti eventually accepted Wagner's works, and the acclaim surmounted the many obstacles created by the man and his detractors. But the interests

of composers, conductors, courtiers, art critics, publishers, and self-appointed promoters, among others, continued to clash. Any map of the diffusion of Wagnerian opera has special characteristics. A map of the first performances of *Lohengrin* is especially telling: It was not performed in Paris until 1887, thirty-seven years after its Weimar premiere; and Riga audiences saw *Lohengrin* before the opera-going public of Danzig or Kaliningrad did (Figure 8). Politics is prominent on the music map.

Wagner was politically engaged, which enhanced his sensitivity to rejection. He actively participated in the 1848–1849 revolution as a pamphleteer and gun runner in Dresden. The consequences to Wagner included scrapping of the 1849 premiere of *Lohengrin* in Dresden. Wagner ultimately used stealth to escape arrest, beginning a twelve-year-long exile from Germany in mid-May 1849 (Wagner 1994, 472–543). Neither Amsterdam nor Warsaw would host *Lohengrin;* Riga and L'viv heard the opera five years and twenty-seven years, respectively, after its 1850 opening. In general, *Lohengrin*'s early performances were in Germany, but Riga and L'viv audiences did eventually welcome the work. Both of these cities were renowned as centers of Jewish culture. Culture appreciated culture in its musical form.

Lohengrin's acceptance picked up with time in the German-language sphere. Acceptance around Munich grew in performances at the München National Theater between 1867 and 1892. Of 2,690 opera performances there, 742, or 27.6 percent, were of Wagner's works (Geck 1970, 324). The next most popular composer was Mozart, with but 240, or 8.9 percent, of the opera performances. Among the Wagnerian operas performed during those twenty-five years, *Lohengrin* had 147 performances and *Tannhäuser* 131 performances. Among the *Der Ring* operas, *Die Walküre* was most frequently performed: 56 times during this period. The stagings closest to nature numerically dominated the performances—*Holländer* had 115 performances—and the romantic works with a natural setting proved most popular with audiences. In 1878 Angelo Neumann, the Leipzig opera director, presented *Der Ring;* it was this staging that Neumann took successfully to numerous major German cities and to cities elsewhere in Europe in 1882 and 1883 (Figure 9). Eric Hobsbawm tracked German empire building through performances of *Siegfried* (1989, 356). In short, the fusion of fantasy and geography found an impressive amount of popular acceptance.[10]

Reflections on Music and Geography

The geography of music, especially classical music, offers insights into the organization of social space. Social stratification becomes evident when one categorizes music: religious chants; music of distinct cultural groups; work music; folk music, including the music of political protest; popular music, both instrumental and vocal; and court and classical music, often patron sponsored. Diversity in types and purposes of music genres is notable: Each genre differs in purpose, instrumentation, and audience.

What else do operas reveal about the organization of social space? Many of Verdi's operas carry appeals for the unification of Italy. Rossini's works served to entertain and were politically neutral. Clemency and masonic philosophy pervaded

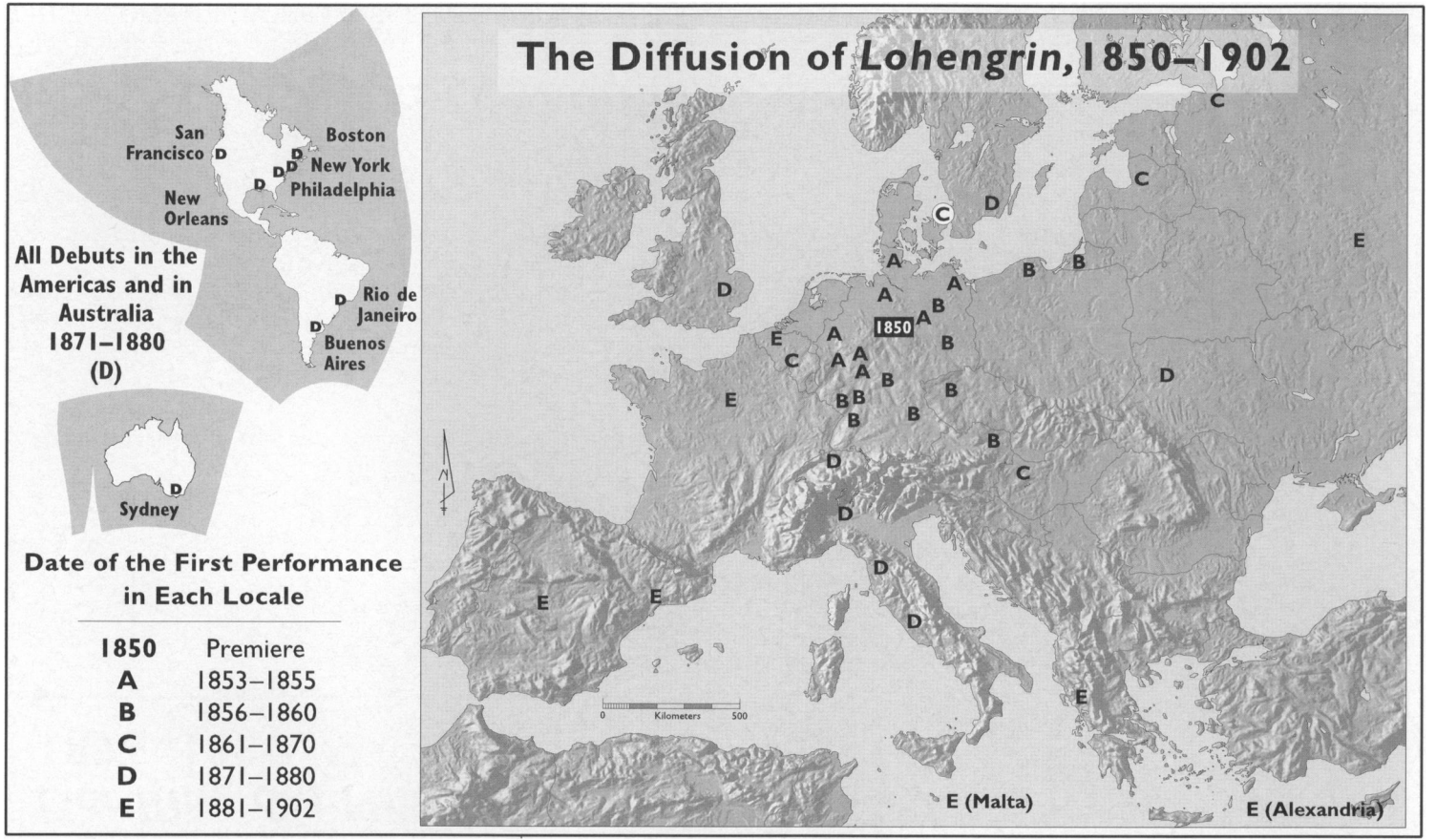

FIG. 8—The diffusion of *Lohengrin* shows culture centers and their respective roles in furthering particular art forms. The absence of Amsterdam, Oslo, and Warsaw is noteworthy. The diffusion of art creates a pattern which is strikingly different from the pattern that is generally associated with the diffusion of material phenomena. (Cartography by the University of Nevada Mapping Facility)

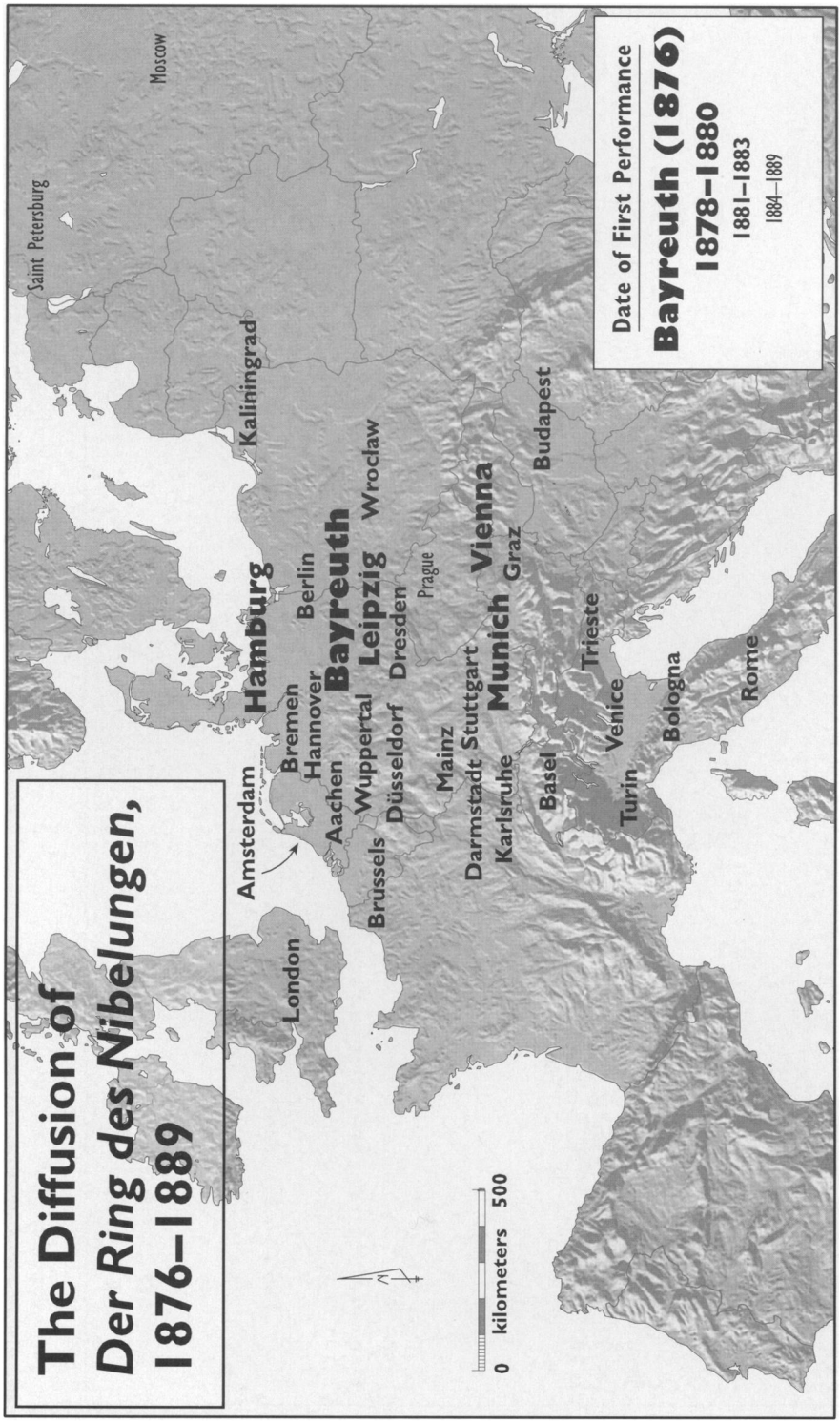

FIG. 9—This map is an art and culture guide to the dominant music centers of Central Europe for the periods indicated. It also shows the pace at which *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was diffused and the influence of director-producer Angelo Neumann, who energized the process in 1882–1883. Berlin is a notable laggard. (Cartography by the University of Nevada Mapping Facility)

Mozart's operas, as in *La clemenza di Tito* (Tito's Clemency). The continued popularity of these works testifies to a universal appeal. The landscapes of Wagner reveal an artist at home in the physical environment: In *Das Rheingold* the tonalities of the opening bars mimic the riverine setting, the rushing waters; in *Siegfried* the instruments conjure a forest aviary. In stage settings Wagner displayed highly directive aesthetic landscape sensibilities, whether the urban Nürnberg in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (The Mastersingers of Nürnberg), the swan-drawn boat on the Schelde River near Antwerp in *Lohengrin,* or the grotto in *Tannhäuser.*

Musical phenomena and criteria, especially site and diffusion, are eminently mappable. Even musical types and instruments can be plotted. As in other types of mapping, however, qualitative or quantitative criteria for mapping and placement can engender inconsistencies—and consistency in classification is needed as a basis for comparison.

Models help to provide the requisite consistency. In a model of popular music, the focus is on musical style, instruments, cultural milieu, expected audience (age and size), access, location, and facility. Classical music has a different context. It tends to evolve out of an artist–benefactor-patron relationship. The patron might expect special performances; a benefactor required less direct return. Small audiences and restricted space limit classical performances in spatial extent or regional reach. A religious motive may provide the structure of such a model, for classical music, in part, is linked to religious ceremony. Consider, for example, the works of Bach, of Handel, and of Haydn, whose *The Creation* is consummately geographical in content. Even *Parsifal* has acquired a religious veneer.

How can operatic works by the likes of Bellini, Mozart, Rossini, and Verdi be fitted into a Wagnerian model? Artists are unique, but their works are universal because they capture the human condition. Maps of operatic diffusion illustrate the pace of acceptance of the art form and its spatial pattern, so closely aligned with the urban world. Although composers are singular, theirs is a world of universals; first the genre of opera, then performers, orchestra, the benefactor-patron, the opera houses, audiences, economy, transportation, and education. This simple model is a starting point whence cultural geography can revisit classical music as a subject and perhaps accord it due attention. A branching into other facets of music yet awaits further consideration. Wagner provides perspectives that can guide a more inclusive model, fitting opera into the geography of music.

Notes

1. Wagner's thirteen extant operas are: *Die Feen* (completed in 1833; first performed in Munich on 29 June 1888); *Das Liebesverbot* (completed in 1836; first performed in Magdeburg on 29 March 1836); *Rienzi* (completed in 1840; first performed in Dresden on 20 October 1842); *Der fliegende Holländer* (completed in 1841; first performed in Dresden on 2 January 1843); *Tannhäuser* (completed in 1845; first performed in Dresden on 19 October 1845); *Lohengrin* (completed in 1848; first performed in Weimar on 28 August 1850); *Tristan und Isolde* (completed in 1859; first performed in Munich on 10 June 1865); *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (completed in 1867; first performed in Munich on 21 June 1868); *Der Ring des Nibelungen,* comprising *Das Rheingold* (completed in 1854; first performed in Munich on 22 September 1869), *Die Walküre* (completed in 1856; first performed in Munich

on 26 June 1870), *Siegfried* (completed in 1871; first performed in Bayreuth on 16 August 1876), and *Die Götterdämmerung* (completed in 1874; first performed in Bayreuth on 17 August 1876); and *Parsifal* (completed in 1882; first performed in Bayreuth on 26 July 1882).

2. Although both Wagner and Verdi can be considered nationalists, they differ substantially. Wagner is best identified as a selfish nationalist, in that he pursued the establishment of a national theater mainly to assure the realization of his works on stage. Verdi, on the other hand, used his artistic talent to further the unification of what became Italy, by inserting into his operas specific choruses and passages that stirred the audiences into outbursts of song and pro-unification frenzy (Yudkin 1996, 279). "O patria mia" in *Aïda* resulted in spontaneous audience reaction, and the chorus in *Nabucco* in which Jewish prisoners lament the loss of their homeland provoked an outcry by the Italian audience against Austrian dominance. Verdi's artistic contribution to the unification of Italy was recognized when he was named an honorary member of Parliament, and his death was marked by a day of national mourning.

3. The Wartburg castle and fortress, near Eisenach, served as seat for the princes of Thuringia. The castle, considered the most famous in Germany, is also identified with Martin Luther, who spent time there.

On their trip from Paris to Dresden in 1842, Wagner and Minna passed the Wartburg at a moment when optimal weather conditions produced memorable light effects. The scene so impressed Wagner that it became the physical setting for act 3 of *Tannhäuser.*

The Hörselberg is a mountain ridge some distance away from the Wartburg. The Venusberg is part of the Hörselberg structure. Ludwig Bechstein wrote a four-volume collection of stories, legends about Thuringia. Wagner used the first volume, in which the Venusberg appears. Hence, Wagner was familiar with the legend and in a way made the "scene" his own.

4. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

5. James R. Oestreich, in reviewing a new opera, begins his commentary thus: "Ludicrous as the comparison may seem, Richard Wargo's 'Chekhov Trilogy' makes a listener appreciate Wagner's Ring cycle all the more. The Ring though conceived over three decades on the grandest scale is nevertheless the most tightly unified of theatrical creations" (1998, 5).

6. As times change, aesthetic perceptions and appreciation undergo alteration. Although scores are never changed, stage adaptations may reflect varying perceptions of time and space. This is both understandable and plausible. It also raises a question of time: The operatic plot, in its environmental setting, and an actual performance, in the contemporary moment, may be separated by a considerable time gap. Because neither libretto nor score is changed, how valid are any of the rationalizations that critics articulate? What is the possibility that a thoroughly modern, stark staging will create a very misinterpretive mood in the audience, especially when the modern stager is concerned about his or her own artistic identity? Robert Wilson has addressed this question in detail in the new production of *Lohengrin* that opened in March 1998 (I attended the performance on 13 March at the Metropolitan Opera n New York City). Each of the three acts has basically the same props: a large, red cloth; an unusable chair; a seatless throne; six large, light boxes set horizontally and vertically; and a white curtain. Has the setting anything to do with *Lohengrin?* No! The same staging could be used with comparable effect for *Don Carlo, Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), or *Tristan und Isolde.* The production can be described as a concert performance.

7. *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot* reflect a time and style and for that reason were permitted to fade; Wagner made it a point to dissociate himself from them. *Rienzi* established Wagner, for it was immensely popular at the time. It was originally very long—more than five hours—and has five acts, so it was planned for two evenings. The available Hollreiser compact disk set runs for just under 218 minutes. *Rienzi* remains largely unperformed, not only for lack of adequate voices but also because of its complexity in staging.

8. In 1865 Wagner began to dictate *Mein Leben* to his second wife, Cosima (Liszt's daughter, whom he wed in 1870). Minna receded in Wagner's life after April 1858, and their lives became separate. Wagner continued to support Minna financially but reduced all other contacts to the lowest possible level. By the time Ludwig II appeared in Wagner's life, his relationship with Cosima von Bülow was well on its way. Minna died in 1866, a year before the first child of Richard and Cosima was born.

Wagner had kept some form of diary, but its completeness cannot be verified and is, in fact, suspect. In personal matters the diary is controversial, a consideration that is relevant when dealing with its factual aspects. Its more personal aspects probably suffered from lapses of memory, selective or otherwise, or the reluctance of the amanuensis to accept certain dictations. Because Wagner's diary ends in 1864, there are at least eighteen years—important ones, at that—of which Wagner does not speak directly to readers of his autobiography. The rate at which his operas diffused can be considered an indirect measure of his financial autonomy. Hence, the slow initial rate of diffusion created serious financial disorders for him, from which he extracted himself at times with flagrant indignity. The financial problem is put into perspective by the fact that the publishing house of B. Schott's Söhne, Mainz, paid Wagner the modern equivalent of almost U.S.$650,000 for the score of *Parsifal* in 1882 (Kluge 1993, 25).

9. The Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin passed through Dresden in 1848, a period of political upheaval, and was a guest at the Wagner home. Wagner, who was involved in antiestablishment activities, became a pamphleteer for the revolutionary cause, a weapons runner, and a guard. For a state employee, this exceeded the limits of the acceptable, and Wagner escaped arrest only by stealth and by fleeing to Zürich.

10. Wagner's music is not limited to opera-house stages and concert halls but is also used as themes in films. Ulrich Müller reviews this aspect in some detail (1992, 388–389). According to him, creators of celluloid images have found Wagner's works well suited to various fantasies. Steven Spielberg uses Wagner's music freely in *E.T.*, as does George Lucas in *Star Wars*. Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) won recognition in part for its soundtrack. The film includes a helicopter attack on a Vietnamese village to the sonorities of "The Ride of Valkyries." Coppola missed the point of the music, which reflects on the drama of father–daughter relationships, and its use in the soundtrack constitutes artistic and aesthetic misinterpretation and misuse. Not even the end of *Die Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods) would fit this film, even though its music is appropriately apocalyptic. This is a case of general misunderstanding of myth and political reality, artistic license without intellectual substance, a facile appropriation that lacks integrity. Müller notes that the music is used functionally in *Apocalypse Now* as an aphrodisiac to "release aggressive and destructive tendencies" (1992, 389).

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