

SOMM
RECORDINGS



SIEGFRIED WAGNER
conducts
RICHARD WAGNER

Bayreuth Festival Orchestra
Berlin State Opera Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra

Although the children of great composers have been honoured in music on numerous occasions, Siegfried Wagner's birth in particular has become memorable for all music lovers, for it was this event on June 6 that prompted his father Richard to compose his *Siegfried Idyll*. A child whose father was Richard Wagner and whose mother was the daughter of Franz Liszt could hardly have escaped a musical upbringing, and from the first, Siegfried's natural musical gifts were extensively and enthusiastically encouraged.

Furthermore, as he was Richard Wagner's only son (christened in full as Siegfried Helferich Richard), the composer fervently hoped Siegfried would become the guardian of his work. Richard Wagner died when Siegfried was only 13 years old, and it was around this time that the youth began his advanced musical studies in Frankfurt with Engelbert Humperdinck, a true disciple of Wagner.

He received further instruction in music from his grandfather Franz Liszt, and for a time as a youth studied architecture in Berlin and in Karlsruhe. It was the great Wagnerian conductor Felix Mottl (1856–1911), the first person to conduct *Tristan und Isolde* at Bayreuth in 1886, who convinced Siegfried where his true destiny lay.

Perhaps it was the fact that he came from such a distinguished musical lineage – along with his independent spirit – that had caused Siegfried to consider following a profession outside of music. Nevertheless, in 1892, following his return from an extended tour of India and China, he became an assistant at Bayreuth.

Almost at once he came under the strong influences of his mother and the great conductor Hans Richter. Siegfried immersed himself in his father's music, studying conducting with Richter and familiarising himself with the traditions of conducting and of opera production that his father had established at Bayreuth.

In 1895, Siegfried's own symphonic poem *Sehnsucht* (after Schiller) was produced, and the following year he made his debut at Bayreuth conducting a complete *Ring* cycle.

This was halfway through the 20-year period (1886–1906) during which Wagner's widow Cosima had been introducing her husband's music dramas into the repertory of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus one by one, and because of the dedication of many great musicians and her own uncompromising attitude to her late husband's work, these productions became the touchstone of exemplary performances.

Siegfried Wagner's debut with the *Ring* was the first time the complete cycle had been produced at Bayreuth in 20 years. It had followed hard on the heels of Richter's *Die Meistersinger* of 1892 and Richard Strauss's *Tannhäuser*, which was premiered at the Festspielhaus in 1894. Siegfried's debut proved to be a considerable artistic success, and his future as the true guardian of the Wagner inheritance seemed assured.

Apart from his evident qualities as a conductor of his father's music, apparent in the recorded legacy he left of his performances at Bayreuth and in Berlin and London, Siegfried was equally keen to establish himself as a composer. His first opera, *Der Bärenhäuter* (Bearskin), setting his own adaptation of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, was premiered in Munich early in 1899 to considerable public and critical acclaim.

In all, Siegfried composed 12 operas, each using a libretto of his own devising, and he drafted librettos (and, in some cases, the music) for a further four. His growing fascination for the theatre led him to take a greater share in the direction of the Bayreuth Festival. His first production as stage director was of *Der fliegende Holländer* in the 1901/02 season, about the same time that his mother's health had begun to deteriorate. He assumed the general directorship from Cosima in 1908, with her full endorsement.

In the opinion of Winifred Wagner, Siegfried's English-born wife, his production of *Lohengrin* was possibly his finest achievement – although Winifred was only eleven years old at the time of the production's premiere.

By all accounts, Siegfried's assumption of the directorship of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus brought with it a relaxation from the severe autocratic methods of his mother. Much later in life, Winifred was to recall that "... in particular, when working with artists, he gave full consideration to their individual talents and temperaments, and also to their physical stamina. This allowed greater freedom to the individual. At that time, his life was forced into a pattern which continually repeated itself. His powers of observation and his understanding, his devotion to popular and national aspirations and his humour found expression in his productions, which were by no means monolithic – different participants could give expression to their individuality..."

The performance of *Parsifal* he conducted at Bayreuth in 1909 was, however, his only presentation of this final work of his father's at the theatre.

His career as a composer grew in the 16 years before the outbreak of World War I, with a series of ten completed operas and two concertos: for flute (*Konzertstück*) and for violin.

In 1915, the year in which his violin concerto was premiered, Siegfried (who was known to be bisexual) married Winifred, and they went on to have four children. Siegfried continued his busy professional life, devoted in the main to Bayreuth in the 1920s, but pressing financial problems associated with the first few years of the Weimar Republic led him to announce in 1924 that he was resuming the Festival without state subsidies. This he continued to do, under the watchful eye of his mother, then in her late 80s.

During the 1920s Siegfried also began a recording career devoted almost exclusively to his father's and his own works. This came immediately after the introduction of the electrical recording process in April 1925, and in many instances the recordings in his discography were technically far advanced for their day. In the ten months from October 1926 to August 1927 he made eleven commercial recordings of his father's music for three companies (Parlophone, Columbia and His Master's Voice) in Germany and in the United Kingdom. There is a further recording on which Siegfried conducts the overture of *Der Bärenhäuter*, which is the only surviving commercial recording of him conducting one of his own compositions.

Siegfried Wagner died suddenly on August 4, 1930, leaving behind Winifred (then 33) and their four children aged 13, 12, ten and nine. This was less than six months after his mother had passed away at the age of 92.

Following Siegfried Wagner's debut as a conductor at the Queen's Hall in London in the late 1890s, Bernard Shaw wrote: "we are certainly old fogies compared to the young man, who shows not only a perfect comprehension of his father's and his grandfather's music... but also an instinctive gentleness and strong patience of handling of the finest masculine qualities, complemented by a sensitiveness of feeling of the finest feminine quality. For my part, I was touched, charmed, more than satisfied."

Shaw goes on to say: "Siegfried Wagner did not take command of the army like Hans Richter, nor led the charge like Felix Mottl, but simply gave the orchestra plenty of time, and trusted without embarrassment to the rightness of his own reading. It was a joy to see how he got the very best out of the players."



LANI SPAHR – audio restoration engineer, producer and annotator – has garnered critical praise from *Gramophone* (“There are historic releases that make the grade because they are just that – ‘historic’ – and there are releases that make history because they are musically overwhelming. This set is both.”), BBC Radio 3, *BBC Music Magazine*, *Fanfare*, *The Sunday Times*, *MusicWeb International*, *Diapason*, *Classical Source*, *International Record Review*, and many others.

In 2016, BBC Radio 3 presented an hour-long documentary about his stereo reconstructions for Elgar Remastered (SOMMCD 261-4). In addition to his close collaboration with SOMM, which has produced several critically acclaimed recordings, his work can be heard on Music & Arts, West Hill Radio Archive, Naxos, Boston Records, and Oboe Classics, and he has worked for Sony/France on historic restorations of the recordings of George Szell. In 2020, he was awarded an Honorary Membership of the Elgar Society for his work on the recorded legacy of Sir Edward Elgar.

Formerly a leading performer on period oboes in the US, he was a member of Boston Baroque and the Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra of Boston. In addition, he has appeared with many of North America’s leading period instrument orchestras, including Tafelmusik, Philharmonia Baroque, Tempesta di Mare, Apollo’s Fire, Washington Bach Consort, the American Classical Orchestra, Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, Mercury Baroque, and many others.

Also a modern oboist, he was the principal oboist of the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra, the Colorado Opera Festival, the American Chamber Winds, and the Maine Chamber Ensemble and made his European solo debut in 1999 playing John McCabe's Oboe Concerto with the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra in England.

He has served on the faculties of Colorado College, Phillips Exeter Academy (New Hampshire), and the University of New Hampshire Chamber Music Institute. He has toured throughout North America, Europe, and the Far East on period and modern oboes and has recorded for Telarc, Linn, Koch, Naxos, Vox, MusicMasters, L'Oiseau-Lyre, and Musica Omnia.

SIEGFRIED WAGNER 1869–1930

conducts RICHARD WAGNER 1813–1883

^a Bayreuth Festival Orchestra

^b Berlin State Opera Orchestra

^c London Symphony Orchestra

CD 1

RICHARD WAGNER

Das Rheingold WWV 86A

① Entry of the Gods into Valhalla ^b 6:50
(orchestral version)

Die Walküre WWV 86B

② The Ride of the Valkyries ^b 5:44
③ Wotan's Farewell & Magic Fire Music ^b 15:50

Parsifal WWV 111

④ Good Friday Spell ^a 10:40
Parsifal: Fritz Wolff

Gurnemanz: Alexander Kipnis

⑤ Prelude to Act III ^a 5:52
⑥ Good Friday Spell (orchestral version) ^b 10:46

Total duration:

55:45
CD 2
Siegfried Idyll WWV 103 16:14

Huldigungsmarsch WWV 97 ^c 7:30

Tannhäuser WWV 70

③ Entry of the Guests ^b 3:58

Lohengrin WWV 75

④ Prelude to Act I ^c 8:20

Tristan und Isolde WWV 90

⑤ Prelude to Act I and Liebestod ^b 15:14
(orchestral version)

SIEGFRIED WAGNER
Der Bärenhäuter Op.1

⑥ Overture ^b 8:30

 Total duration: **59:49**
Newly Restored

 Siegfried Wagner's
1920s recordings

Recordings: CD 2:⑥ 24.II.1925; CD 2:⑤ 11.X.1926; CD 1:②,⑥ 8.XII.1926; CD 2:③ 21.I.1927;

CD 1:①,③ 26.I.1927; CD 2:①,②,④ 8.IV.1927; CD 1:④,⑤ 15–18.VIII.1927

Parlophone matrices CD 1:① 2-20111/2; CD 1:② 2-20014/5; CD 1:③ 2-20107/10;

CD 1:④ 2-20011/3; CD 2:③ 2-20102; CD 2:⑤ 2-8922/5; CD 2:⑥ 2-7955/6

Columbia matrices CD 1:④ WAX 3020/2; CD 1:⑤ WAX 3023/4

HMV matrices CD 2:① CR1298/301; CD 2:② CR1296/7; CD 2:④ CR1294/5

Executive Producer Siva Oke · Audio Restoration Lani Spahr

Tape restoration & transfer CD 2:⑥ Martin Nichols

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