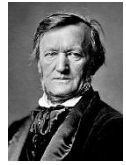


Wagner & Lord of The Rings Lesson 1 Most Students

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) brought opera to a whole new level and even had a special theatre built to house his productions.



Early Life and Career

Six months after his birth in 1813, Wagner's father died and his mother soon remarried. Wagner's step-father died eight years later. During this time Wagner received piano instruction, and he began writing poetry and plays. A few years later, Wagner's mother moved to Leipzig and the young Richard began formal study in music composition at age 15. His early works were mostly for piano but also included an overture and a symphony. Wagner was 19 when he made his debut as an orchestral conductor.

Wagner completed his first opera (*The Fairies*) in 1834 at age 21. In late 1840 Wagner completed his third opera *Rienzi* which was his first huge success. Several more operas followed: *The Flying Dutchman* (1841), *Tannhauser* (1845) and *Lohengrin* (1848). After completing *Lohengrin*, Wagner took the next four years to outline the four dramas that would eventually become known as *The Ring Cycle*.

1. All students- When was Wagner born?
2. All students- Which instrument did Wagner first learn?
3. All students- How old was Wagner when he made his debut as a Conductor?
4. All students- What was the name of Wagner's first opera?
5. Most students- Name another opera by Wagner?



Music Drama

Earlier, in 1842, Wagner went to Dresden for the premiere of *Rienzi* and accepted an offer to be co-music director at the Dresden court. This was a stable period for him and he began thinking about opera in a new way, something he eventually called **Gesamtkunstwerk**--an all-inclusive art form meant to be a synthesis of music, poetry, drama, philosophy, religion and visual spectacle.

Wagner was already writing the **libretto** (opera script). In composing, he wanted the music to flow continuously and be symphonic. He also wanted the voices to be more declamatory and be part of the orchestral texture. In addition, Wagner developed the idea of a **Leitmotif** or brief musical 'name tags' that could be associated with various characters, settings or landscapes, particular objects such as a sword or fire, and even represent ideas and emotions. In what would be very long productions, these Leitmotifs would help listeners make the necessary connections of past events with those currently being portrayed. Wagner eventually came to identify this new art form as **music drama**.

6. Most students- Which city did Wagner move to in 1842?
7. Most students- What was the name in German of Wagner's inclusive art form that was a synthesis of music, poetry, drama, philosophy, and religion?
8. Most students- What is the Italian term for an opera script?
9. Most students- What is the German name for a musical "name tag"?
10. Stretch & Challenge- Why do you think it was important for Wagner to design his own theatre?

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DUTCHMAN
 TANNHAUSER
 FLYING
 PIANO
 WAGNER
 MUSIC
 CYCLE
 LEIPZIG
 LIBRETTO
 RICHARD
 DRESDEN
 LOHENGRIN
 RIENZI
 LEITMOTIF
 RING
 DRAMA
 FAIRIES

