

WAGNER'S OPERATIC REFORMS

I. Opera before Wagner

A. 17th Century. Beginning as revival of Greek tragedy. Introduced by Florentine Camerata (Comrades of Florence) c. 1600.

Form:

1. Sung speech (recitative) to describe dramatic events.
2. Aria (melodic song) to express emotions.
3. Chorus to comment on events and suffering
4. Ritornellos (orchestral interludes)

B. 18th Century. Established form: (sequence of separate compositions in balanced form [regular phrase length] with little or no repetition of thematic material.

1. Overture
2. Choruses
3. Recitatives (preceding aria) or
4. Arioso (semi-recitative with orch. accomp.
5. Ritornellos and dances (orchestral interludes)

C. 19th Century (before Wagner)

1. Overture (summary of musical material use in opera.
2. Chorus
3. Recitative
4. Aria (vocal display in cadenza and melismatic passages)
5. Orchestral interludes (marches, dances, etc.)

II. Wagner's innovations

A. Types:

1. Formal
2. Melodic
3. Harmonic
4. Technical
 - a. Orchestral
 - b. Stage

B Reasons for innovations:

1. Desire to increase dramatic qualities of opera.
2. Thought melody, harmony, and orchestration should reflect meaning of text.
3. Need to expand musical forms to accompany continuous dramatic development.
4. Increased role of orchestra to replace musical interest (emotions) formerly generated by aria.

C. Results of innovations on operatic form;

1. Numbers (separate compositions) no longer present. Each act is single unit of continuous composition (which is the whole opera.)

2. Melodic and/or rhythmic themes, harmonic and orchestral color (Leitmotive) representing various dramatic elements are introduced and repeated throughout the entire music drama as they indicate or complement the ideas, props, action, etc.

3. New harmonic techniques introduced using chromatic harmony

a. Types:

- (1) Dissonant harmonies
- (2) Overlapping harmonic and thematic function
- (3) Chain modulation from one key center to another
- (4) Incomplete cadences

b. Purposes or harmonic innovations:

- (1) Allow overlapping and free interweaving of Leitmotive into the general texture of the music.
- (2) Extend and expand formal dimensions
- (3) Sustain dramatic and musical tension.

4. Sprechgesang. Vocal lines follow the speech rhythms, pitches and contour of lines in text and emphasize the speech accent and stress intended by Wagner

TABULAR LIST OF WAGNER'S OPERAS

TITLE	DATE	FIRST PERFORMANCE
Die Feen	1833	Munich, 1388
Das Liebeverbot	1855	Magdeburg, 1836
Rienzi	1838-40	Dresden, 1342
Der fliegende Holländer	1841	Dresden, 1843
Tanhauser	1845-45 (1860)	Dresden, 1845
Lohengrin	1846-48	Weimar, 1850
Der Ring des Nibelungen poem	1848-52	Bayreuth, 1876 (complete tetralogy)
I. Das Rheingold	1853-54	Munich, 1869
II. Die Walküre	1854-56	Munich, 1870
III. Siegfried	1856-57, 64-65, 69-71	Bayreuth 1876
IV. Götterdämmerung	1869-74	Bayreuth, 1876
Tristan und Isolde	1857-59	Munich, 1865
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg	1862-67	Munich, 1868
Parsifal	1877-32	Bayreuth, 1892
Wilhelm Richard Wagner	(1813—1883)	