

INSTRUMENTATION & ORCHESTRATION:

RICHARD WAGNER AND THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG CYCLE

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND FOR THE RING CYCLE

I will not give a complete analysis of both the background as well as the instrumentation he used. Instead, I will give a brief overview of the storyline and plot, as well as show the instrumentation and its changes that he needed in order to complete this cycle.

This cycle tells the story of the dwarf Alberich and the ring he creates from the Rhine Gold. Essentially, the title in English means Alberich's Ring. The work proper takes about 15 hours over 4 nights at the opera to show from start to finish. Background and inspiration for each of the four parts are taken from various German and Scandinavian myths and folk tales. The cycle proper is full of drama and intrigue, and is made up of the four works:

1. Das Rheingold "The Rheingold"
2. Die Walkure "The Valkyrie"
3. Siegfried
4. Gotterdammerung "The Twilight of the Gods"

The characters are grouped in sections, and are as follows:

1. Gods
2. Mortals
3. Valkyries
4. Rhinemaidens, Giants, Nibelungs
5. Other

MUSIC: INTRODUCTION

The changes made to instrumentation in regard to the late Romantic era as well as other changes by Wagner himself allowed him to complete the operatic cycle known as the Ring of the Nibelung. The size of not only his orchestra but also the singers needed for the work required him to build a large orchestral hall in order to show the work proper. This hall was built in such a way that the orchestra and singers blended together, allowing the singers to sing at a natural volume.

MUSIC: CHARACTERISTICS

Wagner makes strong use in the cycle with the leitmotif. Leitmotifs are recurring themes or harmonic progressions that could musically denote an action, object, emotion, character, or other subject mentioned in the text or presented onstage. Although the technique had been used before, the Ring used it in ways it had not been.

Much of the cycle was written where keys are not clearly evident. Rather, it was written in "regions" or "sections" where each one moves very fluidly into the next. Wagner was also a key figure with his use of dissonance and chromaticism leading to total indeterminacy, whereby the traditional concept of key becomes virtually non-existent and chromatically altered chords becomes more evident. This is a key element/focus toward the use of 20th Century music, and that of Arnold Schoenberg *more in the Section on 20th Century Music*

MUSIC: INSTRUMENTATION

<u>CORE INSTRUMENTATION</u>			
WOODWINDS	BRASS	PERCUSSION	STRINGS
Piccolo	8 Horns (5-8 doubling Wagner Tubas)	4 Timpani (2 Players)	6 Harps
3 Flutes (3 rd doubling second Piccolo)	3 Trumpets	Triangle	16 First Violins
3 Oboes	1 Bass Trumpet	Cymbals	16 Second Violins
Cor Anglais (Eng. Horn, doubling 4 th Oboe)	3 Tenor Trombones	Glockenspiel	12 Violas
3 Soprano Clarinets	1 Contrabass Trombone (doubling Bass Trombone)		12 Violincellos (Cellos)
1 Bass Clarinet	1 Contrabass Tuba		8 Double Basses
3 Bassoons			
<u>ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTATION SPECIFIC TO EACH OF THE FOUR</u>			
DAS RHEINGOLD	DIE WALKURE	SIEGFRIED	GOTTERDAMMERUNG
1 Bass Drum	1 Snare Drum	1 On-stage Cor-Anglais	5 On-stage Horns
1 Tam-Tam	Tam-Tam	1 On-stage Horn	4 On-stage Steerhorns (One blown by Hagen)
1 On-stage Harp	On-stage Steerhorn		
18 On-stage Anvils			