

Richard Wagner
Preludes & Overtures

from :
Fliegende Holländer - Lohengrin
Meistersinger – Tannhäuser
Tristan und Isolde - Rienzi

Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam



Yakov Kreizberg



SUPER AUDIO CD

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

- | | | |
|----------|--|--------|
| 1 | Der fliegende Holländer
(The flying Dutchman) - Overture | 11. 30 |
| 2 | Rienzi
Overture | 12. 53 |
| 3 | Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg
Prelude (Vorspiel) | 11. 12 |
| 4 | Tannhäuser
Overture | 15. 12 |
| 5 | Lohengrin
Prelude 3rd Act (Vorspiel 3. Akt) | 3. 10 |
| | Tristan und Isolde | |
| 6 | Prelude (Vorspiel) | 13. 08 |
| 7 | Isoldens Liebestod | 7. 08 |

Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam

conducted by

Yakov Kreizberg

Total playing time : 75. 06

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Recording engineers: Sebastian Stein, Rob Aarden (1-5) Mario Nozza,

Taco van der Werf (6-7)

Editing: Erdo Groot

Richard Wagner, a symphonic composer in disguise

The overtures and preludes to his operas and music dramas

"I do not know precisely what is my destination: however, I do know that one evening, after for the first time hearing a symphony by Beethoven, I became feverish and ill. As soon as I recovered, I became a musician." Thus Richard Wagner described the enormous impression that Beethoven's music had made on him in his novelette *Eine Pilgerfahrt zu Beethoven* (= a pilgrimage to Beethoven). Although it is difficult to separate fact and fiction in this novelette, Beethoven's music did indeed exert a major influence on the life of the young composer. Wagner was 17 years old when he first heard Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, a work which was to play a central role during his entire life, and which he was, for instance, to conduct in 1846 at the opening of the Festival Theatre in Bayreuth.

At this time, Wagner also began to compose music. The first works he penned included a string quartet, piano music and a number of overtures (including one for Schiller's play *Die Braut von Messina* (= the bride of Messina). In 1832, he completed his Symphony in C within six weeks (as he himself recorded), which was performed in Prague that same year. A year later, Mendelssohn programmed this symphony for a concert at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. Although Wagner never actually quoted his great example Beethoven in this work, he did admit that he could never have written the slow movement of the symphony had he not first heard the Andante from Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 and the Allegretto from his Symphony No. 7.

Remarkably, Wagner hung on to this early work, as opposed to many other scores, which he destroyed. He conducted it himself only once: in 1882, one year before his death, for the birthday of his wife, Cosima. That performance

marked a turning point in the way Wagner thought as a composer. Until that moment, he had believed that there was no real sense in instrumental music by itself, and that it could develop into something meaningful only within the context of a music drama. He then wrote that he planned to turn his back on the music theatre and to dedicate himself entirely to the development of a new symphonic form. Beethoven had taken the sonata form – in which contrasting themes are responsible for the development – to its limits. Wagner planned to write one-movement symphonies, in which one single melody would be developed ceaselessly, in similar fashion to the so-called 'Orchestermelodie' (= orchestral melody): the continuously developing network of 'leitmotifs' in his music dramas.

Unfortunately, these orchestral works never came about, as Wagner died at his desk on February 13, 1883. Therefore, his symphonic oeuvre remains limited to the above-mentioned symphony; the *Faust Overture* from 1840/1844; the *Siegfried Idyll*, which he wrote for Cosima's birthday in 1870; and a number of less important short pieces.

Overtures: *Rienzi*, *Der fliegende Holländer* (= *The Flying Dutchman*), *Tannhäuser*

Wagner's most important contributions to symphonic literature are perhaps the overtures and preludes to his operas, as well as the instrumental sections from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Although his *Siegfried Idyll* was composed as an independent orchestral work, it is still based on themes from his opera *Siegfried*.

In a number of overtures, Wagner continues to elaborate on the romantic opera overture in which the most important themes from the work are reviewed. But instead of writing a colourful potpourri of catchy melodies, Wagner uses the

overture to immediately introduce the drama. This is the case, for instance, in the overture he wrote for *Rienzi* in the autumn of 1840, after completing the rest of the opera. The overture provides a short summary of the most important moments in the opera. In the opening, we hear the prayer of the hero to whom the title refers, followed shortly by the flourish of trumpets which announce the insurrection, and later yet by the love theme of Irene and Adriano.

As the première of *Rienzi* met with such success in Dresden on October 20, 1842, the directors of the Court Opera decided to also stage Wagner's new opera, *Der fliegende Holländer*, and to offer him a position there as conductor. In *Der fliegende Holländer*, Wagner gives the orchestra a more important role as the conveyor of the drama. Once again, he wrote the overture after completing the rest of the score. It unites not so much the different situations, as the various important elements of the opera: the storm and the sea; the Dutchman and his appalling destiny; and the world of the mariners.

In the overture for his following opera, *Tannhäuser*, Wagner took a major step in the musical sense of the word. In this work he used the harmony and orchestration to contrast musically the purity and chastity of Elisabeth's love with the sensuality of Venus' love.

Preludes: *Lohengrin*, *Tristan und Isolde*

It is but a small step from *Tannhäuser* to *Lohengrin*, which Wagner orchestrated with remarkable opulence and density. The music flows forth almost without interruption, and the technique of recurring themes - a harbinger of the 'leitmotiv'-technique - is implemented to a much greater extent. Furthermore, Wagner characterizes the various dramatis personae not just by using different musical material, but also - mainly - by using

different keys. In *Lohengrin*, Wagner departs from the romantic overtures he had so far composed. The prelude to the first act can best be described as a short symphonic poem, which bears no direct relationship to the plot of the opera. Wagner himself described this prelude as a musical vision of the Holy Grail, which descends from heaven and for a short while shines its light on the world of the mortals, after which it once again disappears from sight. By contrast, the atmosphere reflected in the prelude to the third act provides an exciting and flamboyant introduction to the marriage between Lohengrin and Elsa.

In a certain sense, the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* is a further development of the prelude to the first act of *Lohengrin*: it is a closed composition, which to a certain extent is detached from the plot of the work. Wagner began writing the prelude while working on the first act in April 1858. He did not complete the concert version until 1859 and the following year he himself gave the première in Paris. As in the *Lohengrin* prelude, Wagner concentrates here on a limited number of short 'leitmotifs', which are allowed to climax in a great musical commotion and which symbolize the crux of the drama. In a musical sense too, this prelude contains the essence of the work: i.e. the famous, harmonically ambiguous *Tristan* chord, which is not resolved until the end of the opera. The famous *Liebtestod* at the end of the opera refers thematically to the prelude: however, now it is no longer dominated by light and budding, all-encompassing love, but by darkness and death. When the opera ends in the key of B, it by no means leaves behind a sense of resignation: mainly, it is a confirmation of the tragedy which has taken place.

A one-movement symphony?

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

The prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* can be characterized as a counterpart to the prelude to the first act of *Lohengrin*. It is by far the longest prelude ever written by Wagner. The composer penned the first sketches in November 1861 and completed the work in February/March of the following year. By then, he had already written the bulk of the libretto, but had not yet put down on paper even a single note of the actual opera. At first, Wagner seems to be taking a step backwards in this prelude, as once again we are treated to a foretaste of the most important musical themes: the theme of the Meistersinger, the march of the guilds, Walther von Stolzing's Prize Song, and the great love theme. However, as the eminent German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus stated, this is only the upper layer. Just beneath the surface of this potpourri lies an orchestral work in its own right, in which the strict formal structure of a classical symphony has been compressed into one movement. Two themes are produced, then contrasted and further developed in the development, and finally presented again in combined form in a kind of recapitulation. Furthermore, the 'character' of the four movements of the symphony – allegro, andante, scherzo and finale – is the basis for this four-movement structure.

Following his early symphony, Wagner did not write another symphonic work. However, the disguised symphonic poems and one-movement symphonies formed by the overtures and preludes to his operas are sufficient to earn Wagner a ranking amongst the great symphonic composers of the nineteenth century.

Yakov Kreizberg

During the last decade Russian-born conductor Yakov Kreizberg has established a superb international reputation in the opera house and on the concert podium. Born in St Petersburg, Yakov Kreizberg studied conducting with Ilya Musin before emigrating to the United States in 1976. There he was awarded conducting fellowships at Tanglewood with Bernstein, Ozawa and Leinsdorf, and at the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Michael Tilson Thomas.

In 1985 he became Music Director of Mannes College Orchestra (New York) and in 1988 started a six year tenure as General Music Director of Krefeld / Mönchengladbach Opera House and the Niederrheinischer Sinfoniker.

Appointed Chief Conductor & Artistic Advisor of the Netherlands Philharmonic and Netherlands Chamber Orchestras as from September 2003, he is currently Chief Conductor of the Jeunesses Musicales World Orchestra. After five successful seasons he recently relinquished the post of Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and also the post of Generalmusikdirector of the Komische Oper Berlin which he held from 1994 until 2001.

His highly successful work in the opera house has included three critically acclaimed productions at Glyndebourne as well as productions for English National Opera, Lyric Opera Chicago and Canadian Opera. Yakov Kreizberg's guest conducting engagements include the following world-class orchestras:

Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Philharmonia, LPO, BBC Symphony, Concertgebouw, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, Orchestre de Paris, Vienna Symphony, Czech Philharmonic, Santa Cecilia, Oslo Philharmonic, Philadelphia, New York Philharmonic, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Detroit, St Louis and the Minnesota Orchestra.

Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam

It could have been a slogan from a tv-commercial: “the most versatile orchestra in the country”, but in the case of the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam this title is entirely justified. No other orchestra in the Netherlands covers such a broad range of repertoire like the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam does.

With 130 musicians the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra is the largest orchestral organization in the Netherlands. Founded in 1986 as a merger of the Amsterdam Philharmonic, the Utrecht Symphony and the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra continues the tradition of its predecessors in offering an attractive combination of accessible concert programs, in which works from the core repertoire are combined with contemporary music. The orchestra has a tradition in performing the music of Dutch composers and has commissioned and premiered works by Louis Andriessen, Theo Loevendie, Willem Jeths, Jeff Hamburg, Hans Kox, Hans Koolmees and Otto Ketting. Next to these concerts, the majority of which take place in the world-famous acoustics of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam accompanies most of the performances of Netherlands Opera in the Amsterdam Muziektheater.

From the start Hartmut Haenchen has been chief conductor with the orchestra. His performances of Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen* and of the complete Mahler symphonies met with high critical acclaim, both nationally and internationally. Many of his performances were issued on CD, e.g. on the orchestra’s own label. On the young and enterprising Dutch label Pentatone a recording on super-audio (SACD) format of Mahler’s *Fifth Symphony* appeared.

Other conductors that have performed with the orchestra are: Rudolph Barshai, Andrew Litton, Markus Stenz, Dmitri Kitaenko, Emmanuel Krivine, Sir Yehudi Menuhin and Hans Vonk. The orchestra worked with esteemed soloists like Frank Peter Zimmerman, Leonidas Kavakos, Vadim Repin, Maxim Vengerov, Bella Davidovich, Leif Ove Andsnes, Maria Joao Pires, Stephen Hough, Stephen Kovacevich, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Radu Lupu, Heinrich Schiff, Natalia Gutman, Frans Helmersson, Mischa Maisky and Antonio Meneses.

In September 2003 Hartmut Haenchen has been succeeded by the dynamic Russian born American conductor Yakov Kreizberg. With Kreizberg the orchestra will broaden its repertoire, raise its international profile and start on a prestigious recording scheme. Following successful concerts in Amsterdam Kreizberg and the orchestra already recorded Franz Schmidt's *Fourth Symphony* (again for Pentatone on SACD) and in the coming seasons milestones of the repertoire will be recorded as well as compositions featured on the programmes of the orchestra's international tours.

Enthusiasm and diversity: these are the keywords to describe the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra. A small string Divertimento by Mozart, the vast structure of a Wagner opera, or a new work by Peteris Vasks: the Netherlands Philharmonic plays it all, and together with our new chief conductor Yakov Kreizberg and guest artists we try to bring our enthusiasm for the music to the audience. An audience that consists for the largest part of real music lovers, for whom an evening at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw or the Muziektheater is the ultimate experience.



Richard Wagner 1813-1883



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Microphones:	Neumann KM 130, DPA 4006 & DPA 4011 with Polyhymnia microphone buffer electronics.
Microphone pre-amps:	Custom build by Polyhymnia International BV and outputs directly connected to Meitner DSD AD converter.
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Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

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Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam

NEDERLANDS PHILHARMONISCH ORKEST


 conducted by
Yakov Kreizberg

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