

Lucerne: Unique Tribute to Richard Wagner

Richard Wagner had already established more than a passing acquaintanceship with Lucerne and its surroundings before he took up residence in the Tribschen villa, having visited the town on four occasions previously. Wagner's fifth and final stay in Lucerne lasted from 5th April 1866 to 22nd April 1872.

During a boat trip on the Lake of Lucerne with Cosima von Bülow, the daughter of Franz Liszt, he discovered the slightly neglected, but magnificent mansion-house then owned by the patrician Am Rhyn family. Soon afterwards, he was able to move into the completely furnished house. When Richard Wagner signed the tenancy agreement with Lieutenant Colonel Walter Am Rhyn in April 1866, he planned to spend only one year at the Tribschen mansion-house. However, he and his family finally lived at the shore of Lake Lucerne for six years.

Wagner's years in Lucerne are said to be his happiest. On August 25th 1870, he married Cosima. The ceremony took place at St. Matthew's Church in Lucerne. It was here that his son Siegfried, born on Tribschen, was baptized. In honor of these two events he composed the 'Siegfried Idyll' which was first performed on the stairs of the mansion-house.

Siegfried-Idyll's World Premiere

In December 1870 Wagner had secretly composed a serenade for Cosima's birthday. This "Tribschen-Idyll" as he first named it became known throughout the world later as the "Siegfried-Idyll". The preparations for its performance and the rehearsal were of course also kept strictly secret from Cosima. After the general rehearsal in the Lucerne Hotel du Lac, conducted by Wagner, the musicians came to Tribschen very early in the morning of the 25th December 1870, tuned their instruments in the spacious kitchen and took up their positions on the staircase: for the first time the beautiful melodies of the "Siegfried-Idyll" sounded throughout the house.

Opening Concert for the Lucerne Festival

It is worth mentioning that the incomparable "Siegfried Idyll" was again heard 1938 in the place where it had been created, although not this time on the staircase within, but outside in the park in the version scored for large orchestra and under the baton of the Italian maestro Arturo Toscanini, who with this open air concert had laid the foundation stone, as it were, of the International Music Festival, nowadays called Lucerne Festival.

Wagner and His Guests

From 1866 to 1872 Wagner welcomed various famous friends and relatives to his mansion-house in Tribschen. His greatest patron and admirer was Ludwig II of Bavaria. In order to be as close to the venerated maestro as possible, His Majesty even spent the nights in a little room next to Richard Wagner's bedroom.

Other guests were Friedrich Nietzsche who visited the Wagner family 23 times in Tribschen. At any time Nietzsche was welcomed as a guest and almost as a member of the family. Other admirers of music and composers visited Wagner during his years in Tribschen: Franz Liszt - Cosima's father, Peter Cornelius, pianist Josef Rubinstein, musicologist Edouard Schuré, architect Gottfried Semper,

authors Judith Gautier and Catulle Mendès as well as Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and many others.

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Special Exhibition 2010

In the early 1850s Richard Wagner lived in Switzerland not only as a political refugee but also as a tourist and an adventurous hiker. Especially Brunnen and Lucerne were visited by Wagner several times. From here he started his long hiking tours in Central Switzerland.

This year the Richard Wagner Museum opens an exhibition "Myth of the Alps in the 19th Century: Richard Wagner's hiking tours in Switzerland". The exhibition shows how dangerous such mountain tours of several days in the pioneer period of Swiss alpinism were. They often took place with insufficient equipment, mostly on foot or on horseback on unmarked paths. Musical inspirations which resulted from the close relationship of Wagner to the great landscape of the mountains are also reported concretely. The exhibition is enriched by original documents from the Richard Wagner National Archive Bayreuth.

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