

Graham School of General Studies
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Wagner Syllabus

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John's Blog:
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Recommended Readings:

John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*

John DiGaetani, *Penetrating Wagner's Ring*

Robert Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music*

Bryan Magee, *Aspects of Wagner and The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy*

Barry Millington, *Wagner*

Ernest Newman, *The Wagner Operas*

George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite*

Michael Tanner, *Wagner*

Richard Wagner, *Wagner on Conducting*

Course Description:

This course will examine the most controversial and multi-faceted of composers. We will begin with Wagner's relationship to German philosophers such as Feuerbach and Schopenhauer, then continue with his mature operas. We will also discuss Wagner's revolutionary harmonies, his visionary conception of opera, his profound influence on other composers, and his career-making relationships with such figures as Liszt, Nietzsche, and King Ludwig II. Lastly, we will confront the darker side of Wagner: his scandal-ridden personal life and his infamous anti-semitism. Works studied will include *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Parsifal*, *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Syllabus:

Week 1 – Dutchman and *Tannhäuser*

- Der fliegende Holländer, (Dresden, 1843)
- So-called "Two Tannhäusers" (Dresden 1845, Paris 1861)
- Summary of Wagner's life until 1845

Week 2 - *Lohengrin*

- Wagner and the revolutions (1848-1949)
- Wagner and the romantic heritage
- German romantic opera after Weber
- Liszt, Weimar and flight
- *Lohengrin's* Prelude

Week 3 – *Tristan und Isolde*

- Mathilde Wesendonck and Wagner's erotic muse
- Schopenhauer
- Radical harmony; reactionaries and progressives
- Wagnerism (esp. French; see *Tannhäuser* as well)

Week 4 – *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

- Bach; Guilds, nomenclatural issues
- Medievalism and nationalism
- Meistersinger as autobiography

Week 5 – *Das Rheingold & Die Walküre*

- Plot analysis
- Wagner's sources
- The leitmotiv system

Week 6 - *Siegfried*

- Discussion of theories of prominent Wagnerians: Shaw, Nietzsche, et al.

Week 7 – *Götterdämmerung*

- History of Bayreuth Festival
- Wagner and the politics of the 19th century – Bismarck's Germany, France and the New Politics of Europe

Week 8 - *Parsifal*

- Wagner's new orchestra
- Schopenhauer (again)
- Wagner and vegetarianism, anti-vivisectionism, Buddhism