

P R E F A C E

During my scholarly work on Tchaikovsky's manuscript of the *Zigeunerweisen* for piano and orchestra in New York's *Pierpont Morgan Library* New York I noticed a fair copy hitherto unknown to me of four lieder by Richard Wagner from 1868. Of course I knew that Wagner did not write a single new song in 1868; hence I immediately took note of this fair copy and I wanted to explore this subject in depth. The fair copy consists of four songs "from ancient times" (R. W. – Mein Leben, p. 870): *Der Tannenbaum*, *Dors, mon enfant!*, *Attente* and *Mignonne* (The Pierpont Morgan Library, Heineman Music Collection, W134.T166). Originally they had been composed as individual lieder between 1838 and 1839. But comparing the 1868 fair copy to all earlier sources revealed significant changes; this identifies the later fair copy to be a new, second version of the songs. The Wagner Werk Verzeichnis (WWV) by Martin Geck and Egon Voss, Schott 1986, records both versions of them as WWV 50, WWV 53, WWV 55 and WWV 57 as the WWV does not discriminate between different versions in allocating numbers (this is also the case e. g. in *Wesendonck Lieder*, *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*). The fair copy was written out and personally bound by Richard Wagner as a "Birthday-Christmas" present (R. W. – Mein Leben, p. 870) for Cosima on 25 December 1868. In the *Annals* Wagner enters these lieder himself as "*Four White Songs*" under the 1868 heading (R. W. – Mein Leben, p. 870). According to the WWV by M. Geck and E. Voss this fair copy of the four lieder from 1868 has never been published nor served as basis for an edition. The present edition is the first urtext edition of this autograph fair copy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Cosima

Richard Wagner and Cosima, one of the daughters of the great Franz Liszt, met for the first time on 10 October 1853, Cosima being "not quite sixteen" (Sven Friedrich. – Wagner-Biography online, p. 20). Wagner describes his first impression of the fifteen-year-old girl twelve years later to his secretary, lover, mother of his child and wife of his best friend, Hans von Bülow, Cosima von Bülow, as "enduring shyness" (R. W. – Mein Leben, p. 516). Four years later, on 5 September 1857, the three most important women in Wagner's life met for the only time in person in the Villa Wesendonck near Zurich: his first wife, Minna, Mathilde Wesendonck, and Cosima, newly wed to Hans von Bülow. It was there that Cosima "listened [for the first time] with lowered head [to fragments from *Tristan und Isolde*] and remained silent; if pressed she began to weep" (R. W. – Mein Leben, p. 567). On 7 April 1858 occurred the most dramatic betrayal in Wagner's life: his wife, Minna, discovered a love letter to Mathilde Wesendonck and showed it to her husband, Otto Wesendonck; the tragic consequences of this event are only too well known. Many years after, on 28 March 1863, Wagner encountered Cosima again, this time in Berlin, and during a carriage ride they "pledged to belong only [to each other]" (R. W. – Mein Leben, p. 746). This pledge resulted in two daughters, born in 1865 and 1867. The name of the first daughter, *Isolde*, was determined by the preparations to the world première of *Tristan und Isolde*. The name of the second daughter was connected to the protagonist of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* – *Eva*. The complicated love-triangle between Wagner, Hans von Bülow and Cosima von Bülow, who had two children with each of the men – all girls – ended in the fall of 1868. When Richard learned that Cosima was three months pregnant with the fifth child both decided that Cosima and all four girls were to finally move in with him at Tribschen near Lucerne in Switzerland. And when the midwife showed him the child almost seven months later, on 6 June 1869, around four o'clock in the morning, he cried loudly all over the house: "The son is here!" and "dissolved in tears" (Cosima Wagner. Diaries). A week later he completed his opera *Siegfried* and named his son accordingly – *Siegfried*.

The "Birthday-Christmas" Present 1868

But in November/December of 1868 Wagner did not yet know that the child would be a son, he played his "songs from ancient times" in yearning expectation for a son and prepared a surprise Birthday-Christmas present for pregnant Cosima. He selected four of the "ancient" lieder and arranged them in an exact dramaturgic sequence: Christmas, the boy, expectation, snow. He revised the songs, prepared a new manuscript and bound the book himself; one song in German and three in French (Cosima's native tongue). In the *Annals* he recorded them as "Four White Songs" and surprised the birthday Girl, Cosima, on 25 December with this present.

"FOUR WHITE SONGS"

The color *white* refers to snow and winter, as one can see e. g. in *Attente*: "Que blanchit l'hiver éternel" ("blanched by eternal winter"). The first song, *Der Tannenbaum* is a setting of the poem of the same name by Georg Scheurlin (1802 – 1877), published in the *Deutscher Musenalmanach* of 1838, edited by A. v. Chamisso. That is, this poem has been among the most beautiful German Christmas poems for more than 150 years. It evokes the dialogue of a boy and a fir tree; the tragic fate of the Christ Child is foretold.

The second song, *Dors, mon enfant!*, is based upon a poem of a personal friend, who, however, is not identified. It is a lullaby for yet-to-be-born Siegfried. "Je veille en tremblant, Sur ta faible enfance, Dors, mon esperance, Dors, o mon enfant" ("I watch tremblingly over your feeble infancy; sleep, my hope, sleep, my child").

The third song, *Attente*, is also set to a French poem; this time by Victor Hugo – "Expectation" ("we are waiting for you, our hero").

Mignonne, on a poem by Pierre de Ronsard, addresses his French love, Cosima; implying "my love" – this poem can be seen as Wagner's declaration of love for Cosima. "Mignonne, allons voir si la rose, Qui ce matin avoit desclose, sa robe de pourpre au Soleil". ("My love, come, come with me to see the rose that bloomed this morning, its purple mantle in the blaze of the sun.")

After Siegfried's birth in summer 1869 in Tribschen the couple performed these *Four White Songs* from the manuscript present. (Count Eckart du Moulin, vol. 1, p. 455)

On 18 July 1870 Cosima obtained the official divorce from Hans von Bülow; the happy couple married in Lucerne on 25 August 1870.

WAGNER AND CHRISTMAS

In Wagner's life Christmas had always played an important role. The two women he loved above everything else, Mathilde and Cosima, both were born around Christmas, on 23 and 24 December, and used to celebrate their birthdays on 25 December together with Christmas.

On 25 December 1830 the very first premiere ever of a piece by Wagner took place; the lost *Paukenschlag* *overture* in B-flat major, WWV 10. The *Overture in D minor*, WWV 20, was first performed exactly one year after.

Before Christmas he used to secretly prepare Christmas presents for his lovers, e. g. *Träume* for Mathilde (Christmas 1857; the piece itself had already been completed on 5 December, however, Wagner wrote a second version for Christmas, scored for violin and chamber ensemble), *Four White Songs* for Cosima (Christmas 1868), *Siegfried-Idyll* (known by the family as *Tribschen Idyll*) for Cosima (Christmas 1870). Wagner's autograph *Manuscript copy of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*, written in 1830, was his Christmas present for Cosima in 1880. This family tradition of giving presents, celebrating, wreaths and songs was joined by the young and ambitious composer Friedrich Nietzsche, who had also prepared a musical gift for Cosima at Christmas 1871: *Nachklang einer Sylvesternacht* for piano, four hands; Cosima sight-read the piece with young Hans Richter. (However, Wagner "could not bear to listen to the entire 15-minute-piece and had to leave the room prematurely in order to refrain from laughing out loud", as we can read in Curt Paul Janz' Nietzsche biography.)

On Christmas Days of 1873 and 1874 the children sang the *Kinder-Katechismus*, WWV 106. Shortly before his death, at the last Christmas celebration with Cosima, he scored a major success in performing his exactly 50-year-old *Symphony in C major*, WWV 29, at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice; he had secretly revised it for this occasion. This was to be his final concert.

LIEDER & OPERA

It seems as if the lieder Wagner wrote between 1831 and 1880 (the published lieder as well as the lieder not meant for publication, e. g. *Ihr Kinder geschwinde, geschwinde*, WWV 115, Christmas 1880) were a kind of “laboratory” for his large-scale oeuvre. This was not only true for the famous *Wesendonck lieder*, two of which even are subtitled Sketches for *Tristan and Isolde*. Thus, his early *Melodram Gretchens* from *7 Kompositionen zu Goethes Faust*, WWV 15 no.7, 1831, already displays the beautiful, typically Wagnerian melody that later surfaces in the prelude to the opera *Die Feen* WWV 32, 1833/34. Three of the four *White Songs* also are linked thematically to his large-scale works: *Tannenbaum*, written in changing, dualist E-flat minor/E-flat major, he held in high esteem for the remainder of his life, calling it in *Mein Leben* (p. 73) “a piece I still like to call mine”. During the course of his life he was to return frequently to this song. He performed it in 1868, 1869 and in his later years; on 11 November 1878 Cosima notes in her diary: “In the evening he plays a bit from his songs (*Steh still, Tannenbaum* [...]), then Bach’s prelude.” It is interesting how the fate motif of the Fir Tree, in E-flat minor, full of a prophetic character, seems to prepare the ground for the Norn prelude of *Götterdämmerung*, also in E-flat minor (1848–1874, WWV 86D), while the “rippling waves” in E-flat major recall the prelude to *Rheingold* (1851–1854, WWV 86A).

The song *Dors, mon enfant!* with its main theme’s characteristic rhythm is connected to the dualistic musical gestalt from *Fliegender Holländer – Matrosenruf/Spinnerlied*.

The lied *Attente* is an “ideological” counterpart to the *Wesendonck Lieder*’s status as *Tristan und Isolde* sketches. Already the first couple of bars in the accompaniment and the voice’s expectation motif lead us, again dualistically, to the beginning of the second act of *Tristan und Isolde* – excited expectation of Isolde in the prelude, and later the fevered expectation of Tristan in the first scene of the third act: “Und Kurwenal, wie du sähst sie nicht?” (“And, Kurwenal, how, thou dost not see her?”)

EDITORIAL AIM AND SOURCE SITUATION

The aim of the present edition is, on the one hand, to present Richard Wagner’s *Four White Songs*; the songs with a Christmas subject and a dramaturgic concept that made Wagner compile and autograph them as a birthday and Christmas present for Cosima; under the title he himself gave them in the *Annals*.

On the other hand, it is an urtext edition reflecting not only the exact musical text including some discrepant notes, but also some idiosyncrasies of Wagner’s writing. As Wagner was not only a genius composer, but also an excellent performer we faithfully retain his very meticulous markings, e. g. the length of *crescendo* and *diminuendo* markings, the length of the slurs as well as his authentic, sometimes rather unusual dynamics and tempo modifications.

Tempo: In *Mignonne* the tempo marking is *Allegretto* instead of *gracieux*; in *Dors, mon enfant!* we now read *Andantino* instead of “Demi-voix”.

Pitches: In *Dors, mon enfant!* Wagner exchanges the piano accompaniment’s registers. The first and third verses, bars 2 and 22., are written an octave below (cello range) the second verse bar 12 (viola register).

In *Mignonne* he employs chords instead of rests countless times for rhythmic variety, e. g. bars 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Dynamics: In the piano accompaniment of *Tannenbaum* a certain logic regarding the asymmetrical use of crescendo and diminuendo is discernible: in bars 2, 4 and 6 the crescendo reaches its climax three times not on the 5th, but on the asymmetrical 4th eighth-note (the highest note in the group); it is only at the fourth time, bar 8, that the crescendo reaches as far as the symmetrical first eighth. We find the same pattern in *Attente*: in bar 41 the crescendo does not end at the symmetrical 9th eighth, but extends to the asymmetrical 10th eighth-note.

Rhythm: In *Dors, mon enfant!* the rhythm of the voice part initially resembles the *Matrosenruf/Spinnerlied* from *Fliegender Holländer*. However, all editions to date notate the short note as a grace note. In 1868 the master writes the short note not as a grace note, but as a 32nd-note, corresponding with the notation in *Fliegender Holländer*.

Tempo modifications: In *Dors, mon enfant!* bars 27 – 31 are marked as a calming *poco a poco rall.* – the child calms down and falls asleep. It is only in bar 31 that the tempo picks up again a tempo, bar 33 is *molto rit.*, which does not end at the penultimate note, but only at the very last note, which is tied to the penultimate.

The piano part as orchestral score: In bars 1 and 2 of *Mignonne* Wagner writes one long slur across five notes instead of short slurs in order to obtain a cello effect. He emphasizes the phrasing with a crescendo to the fourth note “C-sharp”, the highest note. At the same time he deletes a tie in the upper part; with the aid of slurs and a diminuendo he creates two “replying” motifs like an oboe solo. The third time it is answered by the voice: “Mignonne”. These parts are accompanied in the inner parts by soft eighths as if by strings, without any dancelike staccato and short slurs.

Sources

The original version of the songs was written in 1838/39 and was published in the periodical *Europa* in 1839 – 43. It is important to note that these editions were not supervised by Wagner. The manuscripts of *Tannenbaum* and *Attente* are lost. The later editions by Durand, Schoenewerk & Cie, Paris 1870 (*Dors, mon enfant!*, *Attente*, *Mignonne*) and Adolf Fürstner, Berlin 1871 (*Tannenbaum*) are based upon the first print in *Europa*, as do the later editions by Fürstner and Balling (Complete Edition 1914, vol. 15). The Schott edition *Wagner Sämtliche Werke* includes the songs *Dors, mon enfant!* and *Mignonne* in vol. 17 (1976), both based upon the first version of 1838/39 which exhibits marked differences to the second version of 1868. In *Tannenbaum* and *Attente* this edition is based upon the 1868 manuscript, however, it fails to recognize several subtle, but important details.

The 1868 manuscript of the *Four White Songs* is tidy and calligraphically exact and reflects the songs as written by the master as a second version. A detailed comparison of this manuscript with the *Europa* first print of 1839 – 43 disproves the claim made in the Schott edition vol. 17, that the source is only “a manuscript copy based upon the first print”. The discrepancies in *Tannenbaum* and *Attente* are infrequent, but of high importance. In *Dors, mon enfant* and *Mignonne*, however, there are more than 100 discrepancies to all other editions (including the first print).

Andrej Hoteev

Wagner’s note in the *Annals* under the heading of 1868: “1 black and 4 white songs from ancient times: Birthday-Christmas, [...]”. (R.W. – *Mein Leben*, p. 870) Even if it is not completely clear which song Wagner meant by the “black” one, one can be fairly sure that he meant the children’s song “Schlaf Kindchen, schlafe” (Richard Wagner – *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 17, S. XVII. Schott, 1976); this was later to become a second theme episode of the *Siegfried-Idyll*. (Richard Wagner, *Siegfried-Idyll*, bars 89 – 103)