WAGNER ON FILM: AN INDEX

A capacious but in no way comprehensive catalogue, prepared in conjunction with Alex Ross's book *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*, of Wagnerian moments in the movies. Most of the examples involve Wagner's music being heard on soundtracks, but the list also includes portrayals of Wagner as a historical character, stories directly modeled on his operas, and charged mentions of his name in dialogue. Marriage scenes involving the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin* are generally excluded, unless they are somehow notable or strange. A few representative examples from television are also included.

1898

Maestri di musica, dir. Leopoldo Fregoli. In this minute-long short, an Italian actor famous for his quick-change routine impersonates Wagner, Rossini, Verdi, and Mascagni conducting.

1899

L'Homme-Protée, dir. Georges Meliès. Fregoli repeats his act for the French film pioneer.

1902

Lohengrin, dir. Siegmund Lubin. According to Tobias Plebuch, this three-minute *Lohengrin* scene was filmed in Berlin.[1]

1903

Walkirie, dir. Kazimierz Prószynski. This short film of the Valkyries was made for a production of *Walküre* at the Teatr Wielki in Warsaw.[2]

1904

Parsifal, dir. Edwin S. Porter for the Edison Company. This twenty-five minute version of *Parsifal* capitalized on the renown of the Metropolitan's 1903 production of the opera. It was apparently re-released in 1907. One ad read:

> In 'Parsifal' we offer the greatest religious subject that has been produced in motion pictures since the Passion Play was first produced by the Edison Company about eight years ago . . . We have produced a picture both dramatically and photographically perfect, which we offer to our customers and the public with every confidence that it will be received accordingly. With each film we furnish a complete, illustrated lecture, giving a historical sketch of the life of Wagner and his works, the story of 'Parsifal,' and & synopsis of the different scenes. This lecture is a special feature. It is in itself a literary

[1] Tobias Plebuch, "Richard Wagner im Film bis 1945," *wagnerspectrum* 4:2 (2008), p. 127.
[2] Bartosz Staszczyszyn, "Kazimierz Prószyński: Edison of the Tenth Muse," culture.pl/en/article/kazimierz-proszynski-edison-of-the-tenth-muse, accessed Dec. 30, 2018.

> work of merit, and every exhibitor will find it of material assistance and value in connection with the picture. We also furnish a musical score for the piano when desired.[3]

The director was Edwin Porter, who had essentially invented narrative filmmaking in *The Great Train Robbery*. The film itself is of interest mainly in giving a sense of what the 1903 Met production might have looked like. We see a modest company of knights within a Grail Temple with columns, arches, and a cupola, reminiscent of the stage picture in Bayreuth. Parsifal is shown first as a forest lad in a tunic, with a band in his long hair; he then appears as a more solemn, bearded, Jesus-like figure. Amfortas mimes his agony, thrashing about and pointing to his body, as if to say, "Stab me." The Flower Maidens are a decorous, balletic company; Kundry's attempted seduction of Parsifal is perhaps more discreet than Wagner wanted. Klingsor has the appearance of a stage devil, lurking about in scenes where Wagner did not place him. How music might have supported those episodes is unknown: they unfold so hastily that *Parsifal* could only have been used in snippets.[4]

1905

Siegfrieds Schmiedelied , dir. Franz Porten. In the period from around 1905 to 1910, German companies issued hundreds of *Tonbilder*—short silent films that were intended to be shown with a phonograph record. This film was issued by Oskar Messter Tonbilder.

1906

Tannhäuser, dir. Franz Porten. Another Oskar Messter Tonbild, with Porten as Wolfram and his daughter Henny as Elisabeth. The latter went on to become one of the biggest early stars of German cinema.

1907

Lohengrin: Brautchor and *Tannhäuser: Einzugsmarsch*. From the Internationale Kinematograph- und Lichtbild-Gesellschaft.

1908

Ó Tu Bell'Astro Incantatore, prod. William & Cia. A Brazilian film of Wolfram's Song to the Evening Star.

Tannhäuser: Pilgerchor and *Tannhäuser: Lied an den Abendstern*, prod. Jules Greenbaum. *Tonbilder* from Greenbaum's Deutsche Bioscop company.

Der Tannhäuser, dir. Franz Porten. From Oskar Messter Tonbilder.

Der fliegende Holländer: Abschied des Holländers. From Deutsche Mutoskop- und Biograph.

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[3] "New Edison Films," *Billboard*, Nov. 30, 1907, pdf. The film seems to have been re-released in 1907.
[4] For more, see Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (University of California Press, 1991), pp. 287–89.

Meistersinger. According to Plebuch, Pathé Frères filmed scenes from the opera in this year.[5]

1909

Tristan et Yseult, dir. Albert Capellani. From Pathé Frères.

Lohengrin: Wenn ich im Kampf für dich siege, Lohengrin: Brautgemach, and *Der fliegende Holländer: Chor der Norwegischen Matrosen*, prod. Jules Greenbaum. More Tonbilder from Deutsche Bioscop. The first can be seen at filmportal.de.[6]

Lohengrin: Höchstes Vertrauen, Internationale Kinematograph- u. Lichtbild-Gesellschaft.

Tannhäuser: O, kehr zurück, Du kühner Sänger, Deutsche Mutoskop- und Biograph.

1910

Lohengrin: Nun sei bedankt mein lieber Schwan, dir. Franz Porten. In this Oskar Messter Tonbild, Franz Porten is Lohengrin and Henny Porten is Elsa. Other short *Lohengrin* films by Porten include *Einsam in trüben Tagen* and *Gralserzählung und Lohengrins Abschied*.[7]

1911

Tristano e Isotta, dir. Ugo Falena. This twelve-minute production can be seen at the Library of Congress digital collection.[8]

I Nibelunghi, also known as *Attila*, dir. Mario Bernacchi. A thirteen-minute Italian adaptation of the Nibelung story. Attila the Hun does not, of course, appear in Wagner's version, but images from the film suggest an influence from Bayreuth stagings.

1912

Parsifal, dir. Mario Caserini. This fifty-minute-long adaptation of the opera and its surrounding legends can be seen on Vimeo.

Sigfrido, dir. Mario Caserini.

Lohengrins Abschied, dir. Karl Werner.

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[5] Plebuch, "Richard Wagner im Film bis 1945," p. 127.
[6] https://www.filmportal.de/video/lohengrin-wenn-ich-im-kampf-fuer-dich-siege-1908
[7] https://www.hervedumont.ch/page.php?id=fr10&idv=2&idc=850
[8] https://www.loc.gov/item/87706592/

1913

Tannhäuser, dir. Lucius Henderson. In this forty-minute production from the Thanhouser Company, Florence La Badie plays Venus. Can be seen on YouTube.

Richard Wagner, dir. Carl Froelich. Released in America as *The Life and Works of Richard Wagner*. In the centennial year 1913, the German cinema demonstrated its growing ambition with a lavish eighty-minute dramatization of Wagner's life — apparently the first example of the biopic. Oskar Messter, previously known for his Tonbilder releases, produced it; Carl Froelich directed; and the Berlin-based composer Giuseppe Becce appeared in the title role.[9] Becce had been initially assigned to create a Wagnerish score, Wagner's own music having been deemed unusable because Bayreuth charged an exorbitant fee of five hundred thousand marks.[10] Then, when the actor assigned to play Wagner withdrew, Becce volunteered his services. The film gives a sanitized, fairy-tale version of the composer's life, but Becce's striking physical resemblance to Wagner and his skill in portraying a musician make it watchable. Most haunting are some scenes shot outside of Wahnfried and around Bayreuth: seen from afar, Becce looks uncannily like Wagner caught on camera. At around eighty minutes in length, *Richard Wagner* inaugurated the genre of the feature-length biopic.

The Last Days of Pompeii, dir. Mario Caserini and Eleuterio Rodolfi. It was reported of a New York showing: "The frenzied scenes in the doomed city following the eruption of the volcano were made most realistic by the accompaniment from *Lohengrin* and by a chorus of shrill voices back of the screen."[11]

1915

The Birth of a Nation, dir. D. W. Griffith. This hugely problematic monument of early Hollywood cinema is based on Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, which depicts the Klan as a mystical apparition from the deep past, "such as the world had not seen since the Knights of the Middle Ages rode on their Holy Crusades."[12] Joseph Carl Breil's score heightens those medieval associations by quoting from Wagner. The climax of the film relies on "The Ride of the Valkyries" for its visceral impact—a choice that influenced countless films in following decades. When the Southern hero Ben Cameron, "in agony of soul over the degradation and ruin of his people," has the idea of forming the Ku Klux Klan, Breil supplies an original cue that serves thereafter as a Klan leitmotif. As Marks points out, it distinctly resembles the "Ride" in its reliance on arpeggiated minor triads, dotted rhythms, and augmented chords.[13] As the Klan hordes assemble and ride forth—one of Griffith's most famous shots shows hundreds of white-clad horses and riders traversing an open field—a passage from the *Rienzi* Overture comes into play. Finally, as the riders enter the town and engage in close combat, the "Ride" kicks in, lightly rearranged for the occasion. Griffith's

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[9] See Paul Fryer, "*The Life and Works of Richard Wagner* (1913): Becce, Froelich, and Messler," in *Wagner and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman (Indiana UP, 2010), pp. 65-84.
[10] Plebuch, "Richard Wagner im Film bis 1945," p. 124.
[11] David Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (Columbia UP, 1996), p. 171.
[12] Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (Doubleday, 1906), p. 316.
[13] Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895–1924* (Oxford UP, 1997), pp. 139–41.

rapid sequence of cuts is stitched together by the driving force of Wagner's music, which also matches the constant movement of the horses as they rush at the camera. The effect of all this on audiences of the day can be gauged by a report from a screening in Atlanta: "They are coming, they are coming! GALLERY GOES WILD You know it and your spine prickles and in the gallery the yells cut loose with every bugle note."[14] See also Harlow Hare's report from the *Boston American* in 1915: "But above all and everything else, the biggest thing in the second part of *The Birth of a Nation* and indeed of the whole play is the welcome Ku-Klux-Klan Call, the signal that the Fiery Cross of St. Andrew has been borne from South to North and back again and that the little band of oppressed whites, including the hero and heroine of the story, are to be saved by these Highlanders from the fury of the riotous elements unloosed upon them. The call makes the welkin ring at the opening of each part of the film. It strikes across the moments of agony, horror and suspense like a clarion note of rescue from another world. The call is not original, but an adaptation of the famous call in Wagner's *Die Walküre*."

Robert als Lohengrin, dir. Richard Eichberg. Apparently a parody of the opera.

1916

Lohengrin, dir. Jakob Beck. A fifty-minute condensation of the opera, produced by Beck's Deutsche Lichtspiel-Opern-Gesellschaft. Singers mimed their roles while a phonograph was operated in the theatre.[15]

1918

Der fliegende Holländer, dir. Hans Neumann. Plot summaries indicate that this fifty-minute version is based relatively closely on Wagner's opera, though it introduces a new backstory in the form of a prior shipwreck for which the Dutchman is blamed.

1919

Der fliegende Holländer. Another Lichtspiel-Opern-Gesellschaft production.

1920

Das Schweigen am Starnberger See, dir. Rolf Raffé.[16] This sympathetic and sanitized portrait of King Ludwig II begins with a romantically gesticulating Wagner (Karl Guttenberger) at his piano, dreaming of the prince who might save him.

1921

Lohengrin. A short film of unknown provenance by Universum-Film AG.[17]

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[14] Matthew Wilson Smith, "American Valkyries: Richard Wagner, D. W. Griffith, and the Birth of Classical Cinema," *Modernism/modernity* 15:2 (April 2008), p. 238.
[15] https://www.hervedumont.ch/page.php?id=fr10&idv=2&idc=850
[16] https://archive.org/details/silent-das-schweigen-am-starnbergersee
[17] https://www.filmportal.de/film/lohengrin_5f5b1e81d7fa4c60b26f77cf84c5472d

1922

Nosferatu, a Symphony of Horror, dir. F. W. Murnau. An unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Logically enough, given the long-standing associations between vampire tales and the cursed wanderer of the oceans, Hans Erdmann's score drew on *The Flying Dutchman*.[18] In this same period, Murnau explored the idea of basing a film directly on Wagner's opera.[19]

Ludwig II: ein königlicher Sonderling, dir. Otto Kreisler. In another Weimar-era biopic about the Marchenkönig, the Austrian actor Eugen Preiss plays Wagner. Preiss was Jewish and actively participated in films on Jewish subjects. He co-wrote and starred in *Misrach un Marew*; appeared in the shtetl-themed films *Ost und West* and *Der Fluch*; and played Pope Leo XIII in a biopic about Theodor Herzl. He survived the Nazi era but was forced to embody an anti-Semitic stereotype in the 1941 film *Heimkehr*. After the war, he appeared in G. W. Pabst's *Der Prozess*, about the anti-Semitic Tiszaeszlár affair of the 1880s.

Lohengrins Heirat, dir. Leo Peukert. Apparently a comic take-off on the opera.

1923

The Flying Dutchman, dir. Lloyd Carleton. A plot summary from the time of release suggests that the film was only loosely based on Wagner's opera: Senta is renamed Zoe, and she has a sister named Melissa, who also flirts with the Dutchman. "This picture is artistic," the anonymous critic commented, "but it is rather slow."[20]

1924

Missing Daughters, dir. William H. Clifford. The 1933 reissue of this story of forced prostitution included the "Ride" on the soundtrack.

Die Nibelungen, dir. Fritz Lang. Released in two parts, *Siegfried* and *Kriemhild's Revenge*, each running over two hours. Lang always insisted that his film was distinct from Wagner's Nibelung cycle, even opposed to it in spirit. He said: "I was interested in bringing to life a German saga in a manner different from Wagnerian opera, without beards and so on."[21] This somewhat nonsensical statement strongly suggests that he had a very limited acquaintance with Wagner. (The early *Ring* stagings had beards; so does Lang's *Nibelungen*.) Gottfried Huppertz, who composed the score, likewise made nominal efforts to distance himself from Wagner, saying, "The challenge was to connect an ancient legend with an ancient music."[22] Yet his music depends on a rigidly applied leitmotif technique and luxuriates in dense post-Wagnerian orchestration. At moments, it is on the verge of paraphrasing themes from the *Ring* and *Parsifal*.

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[18] Berndt Heller, "La Musique de la 'Fête de Nosferatu,'" *Cinémathèque Française* 15 (Nov. 1986), p. 11.
[19] Lotte Eisner, *Murnau* (University of California Press, 1973). p. 142.
[20] *Grand Island Daily Independent*, Aug. 23, 1923.
[21] Lotte Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (Oxford UP, 1977), p. 76.
[22] Adeline Mueller, "Listening for Wagner in Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen*," in Joe and Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema*, p. 87. See also Thomas Leitch, "Lang contra Wagner," in *A Companion to Fritz Lang*, ed. Joe McElhaney (Wiley, 2015), pp. 176–94; and David J. Levin, *Richard Wagner, Fritz Lang, and the Nibelungen: The Dramaturgy of Disavowal* (Princeton UP, 1998).

1926

Overture: "Tannhäuser." The New York Philharmonic, under the direction of Henry Hadley, demonstrates Warner Bros.'s Vitaphone system by playing the complete *Tannhäuser* overture. This was the first music heard in the inaugural Vitaphone show of Aug. 5, 1926, which culminated in Alan Crosland's feature-length adaptation of *Don Juan*, with the Philharmonic playing William Axt and David Mendoza's score.

Faust, dir. F. W. Murnau. The original Werner Richard Heymann score used Wagner motifs.

1927

Wings, dir. William A. Wellman. Gottfried Sonntag's *Nibelungen-Marsch*, a medley of *Ring* themes, figures on the soundtrack of this World War I air-war epic.

Der Meister von Nürnberg, dir. Ludwig Berger. A free adaptation of *Meistersinger*, running eighty minutes, which jettisons much of Wagner's plot and fashions a lighter-hearted comedy from it. Conservative Wagnerians, including the composer Hans Pfitzner, considered the film an insult to the Meister's memory and registered a protest again it. Berger, whose real name was Bamberger, was Jewish; his brother was killed in Auschwitz. For more, see Áine Sheil, "Alienated Entertainment: Ludwig Berger's *Meistersinger* Film *Der Meister von Nürnberg* (1927)," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* (2021), pp. 1-29.

1928

Viking, dir. Roy William Neill. This Viking saga was filmed in Technicolor, with a musical soundtrack but no dialogue. The score, assembled by William Axt, leans heavily on Wagner. The *Flying Dutchman* accompanies nautical scenes; the "Ride" serves for fight sequences; and when Helga, an orphaned Viking warrior outfitted in Valkyrie headgear (Pauline Starke), falls in love with a captured English aristocrat (LeRoy Mason), Act I of *Walküre* and *Tristan* come into play. *Parsifal* signifies Christian activity, such as the planting of a cross in the New World.

La petite marchande d'allumettes, dir. Jean Renoir. The original score for this short-form adaptation of "The Little Match Girl," one of Renoir's apprentice projects, included Wagner.

1929

Un Chien andalou, dir. Luis Buñuel. Buñuel and Salvador Dalí produced the screenplay in six days, in automatic-writing fashion; the film was shot in ten days. The opening delivers a shocking series of images: Buñuel on a balcony, holding a sharpened a razor; a thin trail of cloud approaching the moon; the razor being raised to a woman's eye; the cloud cutting across the man; a dead calf's eye being sliced open. At the Parisian première, Buñuel stood behind the screen with a phonograph providing musical accompaniment in the form of a tango record; he later re-created his ad-ho score in a sound version of the film.[23] Then comes title card says "Eight

[23] Max Aub, *Conversations with Buñuel: Interviews with the Filmmaker, Family Members, Friends and Collaborators*, ed. and trans. Julie Jones (McFarland, 2017), pp. 42-43.

years later"; a man bicycles down the street in a nun's habit; and the Liebestod takes over on the soundtrack. As the tango clashes with the slicing of the eyeball, Wagner clashes with the transvestite bicyclist. For the remainder of the film, Buñuel alternates between the Liebestod and two Argentinian selections. In the first Liebestod sequence, we see the bicyclist fall over; the woman from the opening, her eye evidently healed, caring for him; ants coming out of a hole in the bicyclist's hand; an androgynous young woman in the street outside, probing a severed hand with a stick; and the androgyne being run over and killed by a car. In the second Liebestod, a second young man, also played by Batcheff, kills the first with books that turn into pistols. That both sequences end in violent deaths suggests that the deployment of *Tristan* is not simply ironic in intent. Despite the absurdity of the events onscreen, Wagner inevitably gives them a ghostly Romantic aura. The point of contact is probably the dream logic that guided Wagner toward his most radical phase and that led the Surrealists to fresh imaginative extremes.

Scarlet Seas, dir. John Francis Dillon. Karl Hajos's score for this nautical adventure incorporates the *Flying Dutchman* Overture, the *Lohengrin* Act I Prelude, and the *Parsifal* Act I Prelude.

The General Line, dir. Sergei Eisenstein, Also known as *The Old and the New*. A paean to collectivized agriculture, Eisenstein's first sound film follows a peasant worker, Marfa, as she finds happiness and productivity on a collective farm. Eisenstein's notes ask for "leitmotivs through *all* types (timbres) of sound," including industrial and animal noises, in line with Vertov's aesthetic.[24] One celebrated scene shows Marfa taking almost orgiastic delight in the operation of a cream separator. Milk shoots up in fountains; Marfa lets in run through her fingers; her face fills with delight and awe. Eisenstein wanted the sequence to play like a secular Soviet *Parsifal*: he spoke of the cream separator as being "lit by an 'inner light,' as if an image of the Holy Grail."[25] Another fantastical sequence shows a ceremonial cow marriage, which yields innumerable calves. As Fiona Ford notes, one transcription of Eisenstein's instructions to Meisel asks for a kind of bovine *Liebesnacht*: "Moos in industrial theme syncopation, swelling into a gigantic Wagnerian moo as the bull mounts in the sky."[26]

1930

L'Age d'or, dir. Luis Buñuel. The film centers on the adventures and misadventures of a passionate couple who are seeking to escape the constraints of bourgeois social and sexual conventions. Hallmarks of Bunñuel's career-long concerns appear: a phalanx of indistinctly chanting archbishops represents the decrepitude of the Catholic Church; a cow wanders through an elegant apartment; a dinner-party devolves into chaos; a Christlike figure indulges in murderous lust. Accompanying the spectacle is an assortment of familiar classical selections, parodying the clichés of silent film. Mendelssohn's "Hebrides" Overture is paired with documentary footage of scorpions; Beethoven's Fifth, with a group of disheveled bandits, led by Max Ernst. When Wagner comes into play, he serves to introduce the renegade couple. In the midst of an official-looking outdoor ceremony involving civil servants, soldiers, clerics, and

[24] Jay Leyda and Zina Voynow, *Eisenstein at Work* (Pantheon, 1982), pp. 38-40.
[25] Sergei Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Cambridge UP, 1987), p. 39.
[26] Fiona Ford, *The Film Music of Edmund Meisel (1894–1930)* (Ph.D. diss., University of Nottingham, 2011), p. 253.

soldiers—Buñuel's synopsis claims that this represents the founding of Rome—the lovers are discovered thrashing about lustily in the mud.

Later, the Liebestod underscores a scene of the lovers making out in a garden at night. Here the music is supplied by an orchestra on camera: when the players strike up, the lovers are startled, as if not expecting a musical literalizaton of their desire. They fall into sentimental, melodramatic poses, preemptively mocking Hollywood's subsequent Liebestod scenes, although a more carnal, grotesque mode soon takes over. When the man is summoned away—"The Minister of the Interior is on the telephone"—the woman commences sucking the foot of a Roman statue. And, in a shot reminiscent of *Un Chien andalou*, the man is seen with his eye punctured and blood streaming down his face, repeating "Mon amour, mon amour." As the music surges toward its climax, the conductor suddenly breaks off, throwing his baton away and burying his head in his hands. He staggers off as the crowd murmurs. Soon the conductor is locked in an embrace with the woman, and the male lover descends into a jealous rage, destroying a pillow to a brief resumption of the Liebestod. From here on, the soundtrack is dominated by brutally repetitive military drumming, as the man's violent rage gives way to the infamous orgy sequence, modeled on the Marquis de Sade. The final shot is of female scalps affixed to a cross.

Ludwig der Zweite, König von Bayern, dir. Wilhelm Dieterle, who also plays the title role. A sympathetic portrait of the king, hinting at his sexuality and suggesting the psychological difficulty that it caused him. Wagner makes a fleeting appearance, as Paul Cuff notes: "One patently fake alpine backdrop viewed from the portico of Neuschwanstein jars at first, until it becomes apparent that we are inside Ludwig's imagination as his beloved Richard Wagner, now dead, comes down the mountainside toward him as if descending the stairs at Wahnfried."[27] Twenty-five years later, Dieterle would make the misconceived Wagner biopic *Magic Fire*.

Oh, for a Man!, dir. Hamilton MacFadden. Jeanette MacDonald plays a glamorous but bored opera star who has an affair with a burglar (Reginald Denny). *Tristan* furnishes the main-title theme, and the film opens with MacDonald singing the Liebestod.

La Fin du Monde, dir. Abel Gance. The director's first sound film is an apocalyptic-utopian fantasy in which a degenerate, materialist society finds common cause in the face of imminent annihilation by a comet. Gance planned to employ the *Parsifal* Act I Prelude as the recurring signature for his central character, Jean, a clairvoyant poet. Later, when Jean goes mad, Gance intended to insert the Entry of the Gods into Valhalla, accompanying "tumbling, rushing, deformed figures, prisms, pendulum movements, gyrations, giddiness, then a black hole cut through with dazzling coloured sparks." In the event, no Wagner was used. One can guess that Gance encountered problems with fees, as Fritz Lang did before him.[28]

Brand in der Oper (*Fire in the Opera House*), dir. Carl Froelich. Excerpts from *Tannhäuser* are interspersed in the early scenes, but it is during a performance of Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* that the opera house goes up in flames.

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[27] https://strangeflowers.wordpress.com/2018/03/19/ludwig-der-zweite-konig-von-bayern/

[28] Paul Cuff, *Abel Gance and the End of Silent Cinema: Sounding Out Utopia* (Palgrave, 2016), pp. 163-65.

Murder!, dir. Alfred Hitchcock. In Hitchcock's movies, diegetic leitmotifs often serve as plot points and psychological clues—a device that Fritz Lang also took up in *M*, his first talkie, in which the child-murderer Peter Lorre whistles Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" whenever he is seized with the impulse to kill. In *Murder!*, Sir John Menier, an actor-manager who has recently served on a jury, is haunted by the idea that the group wrongly voted a young woman guilty of murder. We see him in his elegant apartment, shaving. His butler turn on the radio: the announcer gives a report on the murder trial, mentions other news, then turns to the evening's musical program, which begins with the *Tristan* Prelude. A voiceover gives a sense of his interior monologue: musing over the trial, wondering if he should have held out against the other jurors, registering his attraction to the woman in question. At the first forte in the Prelude, he suddenly focuses on an unresolved question: "Who drank that brandy?" The music goes on playing as he decides on a course of action to intervene before the woman is executed. The sequence draws on Wagner's long association with dream-worlds, interior monologues, the stream of consciousness. Jack Sullivan, in a book on Hitchcock and music, observes that it is an example "Hitchcock the modernist, creating a revelation from something resolutely ordinary."[29] The groping phrases of the opening mimic the operation of Menier's mind as he struggles to make sense of what has happened. At the same time, the slow surge of the love music discloses his gathering desire for the accused woman. The mention of drinking the brandy may even be a reference to the *Tristan* love potion, whose consumption the prelude describes. As in many novels of the fin-de-siècle, *Tristan* acts as a kind of potion itself, bringing desire to the surface.

1931

City Streets, dir. Rouben Mamoulian. In this high-class gangster picture, Gary Cooper and Sylvia Sidney celebrate their escape from the bootlegging business by turning on the car radio and listening to the *Meistersinger* Prelude.

The Great Lover, dir. Harry Beaumont. Adolphe Menjou, playing a womanizing opera star who falls in love with his protégé, sings a bit of *Walküre*, dubbed by Hermann Bing.

The Herring Murder Case, dir. Dave Fleischer and Shamus Culhane. In this Talkartoon, the Act III Prelude to *Lohengrin* conveys the frenzy that follows the murder of a fish.

Dracula, dir. Tod Browning. As the vampire enters a concert hall, the closing strains of the *Meistersinger* Prelude resound.

Friends and Lovers, dir. Victor Schertzinger. Erich von Stroheim, playing a blackmailer who uses his wife (Lila Damita) as a lure, converses with his latest victim, Adolphe Menjou. How did they enjoy an alleged evening at the opera? They claim it was *Aida*, but Stroheim consults a listing and says that it was actually *La Bohème*. A natural confusion, all agree. Stroheim then corners Menjou with the truth: it was *Tannhäuser*.

[29] Jack Sullivan, *Hitchcock's Music* (Yale UP, 2006), pp. 11-12.

1932

Freaks, dir. Tod Browning. Wagner figures briefly in the climactic sequence of this enduringly disturbing horror classic, as deformed sideshow performers take revenge on two conniving members of their company. A trapeze artist named Cleopatra has been trying to poison the doll man Hans, who has a fortune which she wishes to inherit. As she approaches him with a bottle and a spoon, claiming that she is administering medicine, a member of the troupe plays the shepherd's-pipe melody from *Tristan*. The freaks turn on her, and, after a process that the camera does not reveal, she emerges as a mutilated duck-like being, squawking helplessly. Tristan hears this tune when he wakes from the "vast realm of universal night"; here, the melody seems a threshold for desperate beings moving in the opposite direction.

Farewell to Arms, dir. Frank Borzage. In this sentimentalized adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's novel, a montage of World War I scenes is scored to a curious amalgam of the "Ride," the Donner motif from *Rheingold*, and Wotan's Spear. The climactic scene of Catherine's death is scored to the Liebestod. Nothing of the sort can be found in Hemingway's defiantly unsentimental novel; the novelist disliked the movie and probably hated the Wagner ending in particular. A line of advertising caught the tone: "The mad mating of two souls lost for love's sake to the thunder of a world gone mad."

Silver Dollar, dir. Alfred E. Green. A Colorado gold digger (Edward G. Robinson) strikes it rich and uses his wealth to build an opulent opera house. *Tannhäuser* is staged for the grand opening, but Robinson pays it no heed, chatting excitedly with his guest of honor, who happens to be Ulysses S. Grant.

Fantômas, dir. Pál Fejös. The *Flying Dutchman* Overture serves as the title theme for this often-remade French thriller about a criminal mastermind and the detective on his trail.

Der träumende Mund, dir. Paul Czinner. Elisabeth Bergner plays a woman caught between her husband, an orchestral musician, and an impetuous violin virtuoso. When the married couple listens to Act II of *Tristan* on the radio, their expressions hint at a dark fate. Bergner, who was Jewish, left Germany when Hitler came to power. In 1937 she remade the film in English with Czinner, whom she had married in 1931, but *Tristan* was dropped from the soundtrack. For more, see Kerry Wallach, "Escape Artistry: Elisabeth Bergner and Jewish Disappearance in *Der träumende Mund* (Czinner, 1932)," *German Studies Review* 38:1 (2015), pp. 17-34.

1933

Alle Kreise erfaßt Tolirag, dir. Oskar Fischinger. This short work of abstract animation, involving an elaborate visual ballet of differentiated circle shapes, is synchronized with the Venusberg music from *Tannhäuser*.

Viktor und Viktoria, dir. Reinhard Schünzel. "Dich, teure Halle" is heard during the opening audition sequence.

Zwei Farben, dir. Wolfgang Kaskeline. Another abstract animated film, employing only the colors red and blue. The Magic Fire music from *Walküre* supplies the soundtrack, stirring memories of Loie Fuller's *Danse du feu*.

Sieg des Glaubens (Victory of Faith), dir. Leni Riefenstahl. A dry run for Riefenstahl's notorious *Triumph of the Will*, showing scenes from the 1933 Nazi Party rally. As in the later film, the *Meistersinger* Act III Prelude accompanies scenes of old Nuremberg.

I Was a Spy, dir. Victor Saville. Based on the true story of a Belgian nurse who spied on Germans during World War I, this film includes a brief scene at a gala performance of *Meistersinger*, which the nurse (Madeleine Carroll) attends in the company of a German commandant who is besotted with her (Conrad Veidt).

The Little Giant, dir. Roy Del Ruth. Edward G. Robinson, playing a bootlegger who wants to go legit when Prohibition ends, again tussles with *Tannhäuser*, this time singing a snatch of Pilgrims' Chorus in an attempt to prove his cultural bona-fides. Audiences are meant to snicker when he pronounces "Wagner" with an English "w."

Testament of Dr. Mabuse, dir. Fritz Lang. Released in early 1933, removed from circulation. Police inspector Karl Lohmann (Otto Wernicke) is on the trail of the mad criminal genius Dr. Mabuse. He is introducing whistling and singing the Magic Fire motif. To his assistant he says: "You know that one, Müller? That is from *Die Walküre*. Those are the girls who carry dead police inspectors directly up to heaven from the Alexanderplatz with a 'Hey ho.' On horseback." He is heading to the theater, perhaps to a Wagner performance.

The Ghoul, dir. T. Hayes Hunter. This classic horror film features Boris Karloff as an Egyptologist who comes back from the dead and slays his enemies. Louis Levy's score contains many Wagner references. Already in the title music there is a hint of the dragon theme from the *Ring*, with its falling tritone. The slithering strains of the *Lohengrin* Act II Prelude are heard as Karloff, on his deathbed, predicts his rise from the dead. When a torchlight procession carries Karloff into his tomb, Siegfried's Funeral Music plays. An elaborated version of the dragon theme returns as Karloff rises from the tomb.

Destination Unknown, dir. Tay Garnett. Includes music from *Parsifal*.

Primavera en otoño, dir. Eugene Forde. Includes music from *Tristan*.

Ex-Lady, dir. Robert Florey. In this liberated Bette Davis comedy, an opera singer at an upper-crust dinner party belts out "Dich, teure Halle" from *Tannhäuser*. Hedwiga Reicher acts the part but presumably does not sing it.

Facing the Music, dir. Harry Hughes. Includes a Wagner selection titled "Death Song," presumably the Liebestod.

Liebelei, dir. Max Ophuls. Published credits indicate that Theo Mackeben's original score incorporated music by Wagner, but none can be heard in the available version.

1934

Three Songs of Lenin, dir. Dziga Vertov. The central section of Vertov's paean to Lenin, reedited in 1938, is devoted a brilliantly edited montage of scenes from Lenin's funeral, some documentary and some staged. Amid the title cards that introduce the sequence, we see shots of the living Lenin—mingling with the people, orating on the podium—juxtaposed with shots of his corpse. On the soundtrack, we hear soft, halting drumbeats and upward-slithering figures—Siegfried's Funeral Music, which was played when Lenin died. The people pay homage, some shuffling past the camera and others staring out in a daze. In the throng we see Mikhail Kalinin and Vyacheslav Molotov, allies of Joseph Stalin's during his rise to power. Stalin himself appears shortly after, intent and watchful. John McKay reveals: "A remarkable set of instructions from 1934 compiled by Vertov for the film's sound projectionist indicate not only that Stalin appeared throughout the film, but that Vertov generally intended the volume of the soundtrack to take on 'maximum loudness' when the dictator appeared, as (for example) during the funeral sequence." [30] Vertov creates a potent counterpoint between the coursing masses of mourners and the motionless body of the leader, with Wagner's music seeming to express motion and stasis in equal measure. The music's transition from tragic minor to heroic major is aligned to hopeful signs reading "The revolution lives on," "Lenin is our immortality," "We shall complete what you began, Ilyich." Images of fires, smoke, and horses make one think that the body is about to placed upon a pyre. (The identification between Siegfried and Lenin is amplified by the title theme that Yuri Shaporin wrote for the film, one that pointedly echoes the first notes of Siegfried's leitmotif.) The music stops, the clock strikes four, and guns ring out: soldiers' rifles, cannons, battleship batteries. We see solitary figures in far-flung landscapes, deserts and icy wastes, stopping as if to listen. Lenin's silence is filled by the noise of Soviet power.

Stingaree, dir. William A. Wellman. An Australian servant (Irene Dunne) vaults to stardom after she is discovered by the outlaw Stingaree (Richard Dix), who is impersonating a famous English composer. Max Steiner's score incorporates a bit of the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude in a montage of Dunne's triumphs. In the course of his impersonation, Stingaree says: "Wagner's music won't last. Preposterous. I give it two more years. But the opera at the Savoy is excellent."

The Scarlet Empress, dir. Josef von Sternberg. An orchestral fantasia on the "Ride" is heard as Catherine the Great (Marlene Dietrich), in hussar uniform, leads a coup d'état against her husband, Peter. The music soon turns in a Tchaikovskyan direction, morphing into the latter's *Marche Slav*. The coda of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* closes out the picture, as Catherine rides to the throne, dismounts, and stands beaming beside her white stallion; but a trace of the Valkyrie motif, on trumpet, is added as a crowning touch. Interestingly, Sternberg lived for periods in the Palazzo Vendramin, in Venice, where Wagner died. Karl Vollmoeller, who contributed to the screenplay for Sternberg's *The Blue Angel*, rented the palace for many years.

The Old Fashioned Way. The Act III Prelude from *Lohengrin* introduces W, C. Fields in his act as the Great McGonigle, a juggler showman.

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[30] John McKay, "Allegory and Accommodation: Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) as a Stalinist Film," *Film History* 18 (2006), p. 378.

Musik im Blut, dir. Erich Waschneck. This behind-the-scenes love story among musicians, made early in the Nazi period, includes a *Tannhäuser* opera scene. The renowned Wagner tenor Leo Slezak plays a Kapellmeister.

1935

Synchromy No. 2, dir. Mary Ellen Bute and Ted Nemeth. A short experimental film employing complicated abstract forms, edited to "O, du mein holder Abendstern" from *Tannhäuser*.

Music Land, dir. Wilfred Jackson, part of Walt Disney's Silly Symphonies series. In a climactic battle between the Land of Symphony and the Isle of Jazz, organ pipes are lowered to become battleship guns, blasting the "Ride." An ingenious counterpoint of Wagner and jazz ensues. A truce is called, followed by marriage: first a "straight" version of the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin*, then a jazzed-up version on the Bridge of Harmony between the two lands.

Rural Mexico, dir. Louis Lewyn. A documentary travelogue presented by James A. Fitzpatrick, part of his Traveltalks series. The "Ride" is used for a sequence devoted to the pyramids of Teotihuacan.

Mad Love, dir. Karl Freund. Peter Lorre stars as Doctor Gogol, who transplants a killer's hands onto the pianist husband of an actress with whom he is besotted. The *Siegfried Idyll* plays incongruously during two surgery sequences, with Gogol going mad during the second.

Vanessa: Her Love Story, dir. William K. Howard. At a *Tristan* performance, a deranged baron (Otto Kruger) makes paranoid accusations against his wife, Vanessa (Helen Hayes). When he dies, she is freed to marry her true love.

Triumph of the Will, dir. Leni Riefenstahl. The most notorious propaganda film ever made is routinely described as "Wagnerian," though the association is mostly pejorative. When, at the beginning of the picture, Hitler descends from the clouds in his airplane, the scene seems tailor-made for "The Ride of the Valkyries." Yet, despite erroneous claims in some accounts of the film, Wagner is not used in this sequence, nor does the score, by the onetime modernist Herbert Windt, sound particularly Wagnerian. It is more in the manner of Richard Strauss, with the "Horst Wessel Lied" woven in. In any case, Windt contributed only twelve minutes of original score, the rest being marches and songs. Two-thirds of the soundtrack consists simply of Hitler speaking.[31] As in *Victory of Faith*, chorales from the Prelude to Act III of *Meistersinger* are heard during a sequence of scenes from old Nuremberg. Toward the end, during the parade preceding Hitler's closing speech, band plays the *Nibelungen-Marsch*, Gottfried Sonntag's *Ring* medley.

The Right to Live, dir. William Keighley, based on W. Somerset Maugham's play *The Sacred Flame*. Stella (Josephine Hutchinson) and Maurice (Colin Clive) become engaged following a performance of *Tristan*, one in which the men wear curious Viking helmets. Not long after the wedding, Maurice is paralyzed in an accident, and Stella falls in love with his brother, Colin

[31] Stefan Strötgen, "I compose the Party Rally...": The Role of Music in Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will," *Music & Politics* 2:1, p. 2.

(George Brent). The two pretend to go to another performance of *Tristan* and are caught when they can't name the principals. Maurice kills himself in order to free his wife.

1936

Windbag the Sailor, dir. William Beaudine. The English comedian Will Hay and his companions find themselves stranded on a West Indies island. When a radio washes ashore playing the "Ride," they use it to mesmerize the natives, who worship it as a god.

Mickey's Grand Opera, dir. Wilfred Jackson. The *Lohengrin* Act III prelude introduces this operatic short with Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Pluto, although the main event is a menagerie of animals performing the quartet from *Rigoletto*.

Sitting on the Moon, dir. Ralph Staub. In this musical comedy, a studio boss wants a new hit song from Danny West (Roger Pryor), who, having not written anything, plays a rag version on "O du, mein holder Abendstern," from *Tannhäuser*. "Not bad, but it needs some polishing," the boss says. "When did you write that melody, Danny? It's terrific." Danny replies: "It should be, it's only Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in disguise." "It is? You can't get away with that, it's stealing." "So what? He never made any money out of it."

Sacred City of the Mayan Indians. Apparently the same material as in *Rural Mexico* above.

Der Kaiser von Kalifornien, dir. Luis Trenker. This notorious "Nazi Western" tells of the Swiss-American colonist John Sutter, on whose land the Gold Rush began. Trenker, who also played the title role, filmed some scenes on location in the American West. The score is by Giuseppe Becce, who played Wagner in Carl Froelich's 1913 biopic; it has a distinctly Wagnerian flavor, variously echoing Siegfried's main motif, the "Ride," and *The Flying Dutchman*. Although Hitler and Goebbels admired Trenker's often spectacular filmmaking, they objected to the bleak ending, which finds Sutter destroyed by the forces that were unleashed on his land. The message is vaguely anti-capitalist: "Gold brings only disaster and ruin!" Just how aligned the film is with Nazi ideology remains a topic of debate.[32]

Stars on Parade, dir. Oswald Mitchell. This filmed variety show includes Debroy Somers and his band performing a *Tannhäuser* selection.

Flash Gordon, Chapter 1: The Planet of Peril, dir. Frederick Stephani. When Flash, Dr. Zarkov, and Dale Arden land on the alien planet Mongo, Komodo-dragon-like creatures creep around to music adapted, strangely, from the Dresden Amen music of *Parsifal*.

The Lion Man, dir. John P. McCarthy. In this problematic tale of a British boy exacting revenge on the Arab sheik who killed his father, the "Ride" provides both the introductory theme music and the triumphant ending. Curiously, Siegfried's Rhine Journey is used to accompany images of camel-riding in the desert.

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[32] See, for example, Franz A. Birgel, "Luis Trenker: A Rebel in the Third Reich? *Der Rebell*, *Der Verlorene Sohn*, *Der Kaiser von Kalifornien*, *Condottieri*, and *Der Feuerteufel*," in *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens: Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich*, ed. Robert C. Reimer (Camden House, 2002), pp. 37–64.

Red River Valley, dir. R. Reeves Eason. In a musical choice undoubtedly inspired by *The Birth of a Nation*, the "Ride" and *Rienzi* are heard during a mob scene at a dam.

Sextánka (*Sweet Sixteen*), dir. Svatopluk Innemann. In this questionable Czech melodrama, a girl who has fallen in love with her teacher listens ecstatically to *Tristan* on the radio.

1937

One Hundred Men and a Girl, dir. Henry Koster. Deanna Durbin, seeking to support her struggling musician father and his band of unemployed colleagues, persuades the great Leopold Stokowski, played by himself, to lead a concert. Stokowski is seen conducting the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude.

When Love Is Young, dir. Hal Mohr. An aspiring opera singer from rural Pennsylvania (Virginia Bruce) makes it big on Broadway. Features the "Ride."

Music for Madame, dir. John G. Blystone. Another aspiring-opera-singer story, this time starring Nino Martini. The *Tannhäuser* Overture is played at the Hollywood Bowl.

Maytime, dir. Robert Z. Leonard. A musical melodrama about the life of a once celebrated, now forgotten opera singer (Jeanette MacDonald). Features music from *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan*. The opera critic and cinéaste David Shengold adds two points: the eighteen-year-old George London, later to become an eminent Wagnerian bass-baritone, was an uncredited chorister, and the German operetta on which the film was based, *Wie einst im Mai*, was written by Walter Kollo, grandfather of the Heldentenor René Kollo.

Framing Youth, dir. Gordon Douglas. This Little Rascals short features a tiny snippet of the *Tannhäuser* Overture, heard during a radio broadcast.

Fantasia musica, dir. Johan Gildemeijer. A Dutch film based on *Tannhäuser*.

Angel, dir. Ernst Lubitsch. A debonair Lubitsch love triangle involving Marlene Dietrich, her neglectful husband Herbert Marshall, and her lover Melvyn Douglas. When, before the triangle is revealed, Dietrich and Marshall go to the opera together, it turns out to be *Tristan*, though we hear only the first four notes.

1938

The Young in Heart, dir. Richard Wallace. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., playing a con artist turned car salesman, hawks a futuristic car called the Flying Wombat, for which the "Ride" serves as leitmotif. Franz Waxman, who composed the score, amuses himself with satirical variations.

Daffy Duck in Hollywood, dir. Tex Avery. A German-accented movie director named Director von Hamburger is screening his latest work, *Gold Is Where You Find It*, for the producer I. M. Stupendous. The sword theme and the "Ride" motif from the *Ring* accompany images of gold

miners out west (derived from an actual Warner picture of the same title). However, it turns out that Daffy has substituted a nonsensical montage of mismatched scenes in the remainder of the reel. Hamburger faints, but Stupendous loves what he sees, resulting in Daffy's appointment as the new star director.

The Gaunt Stranger, also known as *The Phantom Strikes*, dir. Walter Forde. This adaptation of an Edgar Wallace thriller includes music from *Tristan*.

Woman Against Woman, dir. Robert B. Sinclair. The *Meistersinger* Prelude is played on a turntable in one scene of this marital drama.

Med folket för fosterlandet, dir. Sigurd Wallén. This Swedish historical narrative features music from *Lohengrin*.

Two-Gun Man from Harlem, dir. Richard C. Kahn. One of a series of Westerns marketed toward African-American audiences. The mixed-race actor Herb Jeffries, who identified sometimes as Black and sometimes as white, plays the singing cowboy Bob Blake, who leaves town when he is wrongly accused of murder. Jeffries also wrote the score, which quotes the *Flying Dutchman* Overture as Blake makes his way to Harlem.

Farmyard Symphony, dir. Jack Cutting. In this installment of Disney's Silly Symphonies series, the *Tannhäuser* Overture resounds as the piglet Spotty triumphantly munches on corn.

I See Ice, dir. Anthony Kimmins. This British comedy features an arrangement of "Romanza," from Wagner's *Albumblatt*.

The Big Broadcast of 1938, dir. Mitchell Leisen. In this variety-show film, Bob Hopes introduces the great Norwegian soprano Kirsten Flagstad, who, in lavish Valkyrie regalia, unleashes Brünnhilde's battle-cry of "Ho jo to ho!"

Inside Nazi Germany, dir. Jack Glenn. This fifteen-minute March of Time quasi-documentary gave American audiences a critical look at Nazi Germany. An instrumental version of the Dance of the Apprentices from *Meistersinger* plays during a segment on German farming policy, which, like much of the film, relies on reenactments. According to the scholar Scott Paulin, Wagner was also used in the March of Time newsreels "Hitler Sets the Stage for His Coup" (Feb. 17, 1938) and "Hitler Takes Austria" (March 17, 1938).[33]

Remontons les Champs-Elysées, dir. Sacha Guitry. This comedic history of the Champs-Elysées includes an episode in which the proprietor of Les Ambassadeurs, the famous restaurant at the Hôtel de Crillon, hires the young, impoverished Wagner as the director of the café orchestra. He is later fired for obstinately playing his own compositions, including the Entry of the Guests at the Wartburg from *Tannhäuser*. Robert Pizani, who portrays Wagner, goes on to play Jacques Offenbach in a subsequent scene.

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[33] Scott D. Paulin, "Piercing Wagner: The *Ring* in *Golden Earrings*," in Joe and Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema*, pp. 227–28.

Three Comrades (1938), dir. Frank Borzage. German WWI veterans are working in an auto shop. When Margaret Sullavan stops by, she says to Franchot Tone: "Now let's have some Beethoven. No, I imagine Wagner is easier with that hammer."

1939

Confessions of a Nazi Spy, dir. Anatole Litvak. Warner Brothers, the first Hollywood studio to take a critical stance toward Nazism, released this tale of a Nazi spy ring operating on American soil. Max Steiner wrote the score and folded Wagner into his leitmotif system. A 1940 re-release of the film included montage of the Nazi assault on Poland, the Netherlands, and France: for this Steiner rang variations on the Siegfried motif and a bit of the "Rite."

At the Circus, dir. Edward Buzzell. Margaret Dumont, the Marx Brothers' infallible foil, has hired a pompous French conductor and his orchestra to play at her grandiose Newport estate. Groucho and company, wanting to dispose of this rival group so their circus act can collect Dumont's paycheck, arrange for the Frenchmen to perform on a barge at water's edge, then cut them loose. The last shot shows the orchestra blasting Wagner as they float obliviously out to sea. Still, the flamboyant coda for the prelude—added to the score by Engelbert Humperdinck—put a seal on the Marxian comic triumph.

¡Presente!, dir. Heinrich Gärtner. Siegfried's Funeral Music figures in this depiction of the funeral of Spanish Fascist José Antonio Primo de Rivera—propaganda released by the Franco regime in the wake of the Spanish Civil War. The Austrian-Jewish Gärtner had fled Germany in 1933 and established himself in Spain, working mainly as a cinematographer.

Idiot's Delight, dir. Clarence Brown. Adapted by Robert Sherwood from his anti-fascist, anti-war play, this strange and garbled film recounts the fate of an American performer (Clark Gable) and various other travelers trapped in an Alpine hotel in an unnamed country at war. Political references were kept deliberately vague, in order to avoid offending the German and Italian regimes, but there's a clear reference to Hitler's well-known musical obsession. When Captain Kirvline (Joseph Schildkraut) is searching for news on the radio, he comes upon a station playing the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude. "Nothing from Berlin except Wagner," he says. The Ride of the Valkyries is quoted at the beginning of Herbert Stothart's main-title music.

Babes in Arms, dir. Busby Berkeley. Rodgers and Hart's musical about rebellious vaudeville kids is given the full Berkeley treatment, with the title song staged as a marching-and-dancing spectacle around a bonfire. One verse is set to the strains of the "Ride," with Don Brice (Douglas McPhail) singing: "What do we cheer for? What are we here for? Why were we born? What do we cry for? What do we die for? Why do we mourn?" The scholar David Eldridge points out that the film reflects a national anxiety about disadvantaged, alienated youth during the Great Depression: "Such acute apprehension was informed by the shock of seeing just how popular anti-democratic ideas had become among the disaffected young people of Europe."[34] Thus, the seemingly boisterous takeoff of the "Ride" is meant to stir associations with imagery coming out

[34] David Eldridge, "'We're Only Kids Now, But Someday …': Hollywood Musicals and the Great Depression Youth Crisis," in *Hollywood and the Great Depression: American Film, Politics and Society in the 1930s*, ed. Iwan Morgan and Philip John Davies (Edinburgh UP, 2018), pp. 225–26.

of Nazi Germany: marching youth, bonfires, torch processions. By the end, Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, and the rest of the kids are swept up in the patriotic, anti-fascist pageant of "God's Country," celebrating a place where all are free and "every man is his own dictator." The message is undercut by the grotesque blackface routine that precedes the finale.

Sniffles and the Bookworm, dir. Chuck Jones. In this installment of Warner's Merrie Melodies series, the Frankenstein monster intrudes on a midnight frolic of Mother Goose characters, with the giants' theme from *Rheingold* accompanying him.

Fresh Fish, dir. Tex Avery. A Merrie Melodies cartoon exploring marine life around a South Seas island. The "Ride" accompanies the appearance of the elusive Whim-Wham Whistling Shark, who consumes the deep-sea scientist searching for him.

Detouring America, dir. Tex Avery. A Merrie Melodies cartoon leading viewers on a playful tour of American locales. Here the Pilgrims' Chorus represents the majesty of a redwood forest.

Naughty But Nice, dir. Ray Enright. The "Ride" briefly figures in the score for this frantic Warner Brothers comedy about a jazz-hating composer who accidentally writes a hit swing tune.

1940

Escape, dir. Mervyn LeRoy. This film presents one of the earliest instances of the soon-to-be-familiar filmic archetype of the Wagner-loving Nazi. A German actress is imprisoned in a concentration camp (Alla Nazimova), and her American son (Robert Taylor) tries to rescue her. In the process he meets Countess von Treck (Norma Shearer), the American-born widow of a German count who is presently in love with a Wehrmacht general (Conrad Veidt, previously seen as a Wagnerian German in *I Was a Spy*). When the latter plays the Liebestod on the piano, Shearer says, "Oh, do play something else, Kurt." Veidt replies: "I thought *Tristan* was our favorite opera." Shearer says: "Well, perhaps I've heard it too often." When the Taylor character begins to intrude, Veidt says, "If he goes on bothering us, he can be taken care of"—whereupon he ominously plays a few notes from the Liebestod on the piano. Still, *Tristan* retains its older function as a signal of passion. Taylor approaches Shearer when she is alone in her box at the opera, again listening to the Liebestod. They proceed to talk in the hall outside, love blossoming between them.

The Great Dictator, dir. Charlie Chaplin. The prelude to Act I *Lohengrin*, an evocation of the presence and power of the Holy Grail, is heard twice in Chaplin's satire of Hitler, with radically different interpretations. The first comes in the palatial offices of the dictator Adenoid Hynkel, who is attended by his propaganda minister, Herr Garbitsch. After the two discuss the possibility of Hynkel becoming "dictator of the world," the latter says, "Leave me, I want to be alone." The Wagner starts, and Hynkel performs a strangely elegant ballet with a balloon globe of the world. The second *Lohengrin* excerpt comes at the very end of the picture, when the Jewish Barber offers up an ecstatic vision of a perfected vision: "We are coming out of the darkness into the light. We are coming into a new world, a kindlier world, where men will rise above their hate, their greed and brutality. Look up, Hannah! The soul of man has been given wings, and at last he is beginning to fly. He is flying into the rainbow, into the light of hope, into the future, the

glorious future that belongs to you, to me, and to all of us. Look up, Hannah! Look up!" Wagner seems to speak equally to Hynkel's megalomania and the Barber's utopia.[35]

Wacky Wildlife, dir. Tex Avery. The first three Merrie Melodies from 1940 featuring Wagner. The Good Friday Spell underscores lambs grazing in Montana, and, as in *Detouring America* from the previous year, the Pilgrims' Chorus represents a grand redwood forest.

Arise, My Love, dir. Mitchell Leisen. Sonntag's *Nibelungen-Marsch* is heard as the Germans occupy Paris.

Cross Country Detours, dir. Tex Avery. Here the Pilgrims' Chorus represents the Grand Canyon.

Tom Thumb in Trouble, dir. Chuck Jones. The "Ride" resounds as Tom Thumb braves a snowstorm to find the little bird who had rescued him from drowning.

1941

Citizen Kane, dir. Orson Welles. Welles was one of several leading twentieth-century directors, alongside Ingmar Bergman and Stanley Kubrick, who seemed to make a point of steering clear of Wagner. But the *Tannhäuser* Overture figures very briefly in the newsreel summarizing the life of Charles Foster Kane.

The Chocolate Soldier, dir. Roy Del Ruth. An adaptation of Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, starring Nelson Eddy and Risë Stevens as opera singers. Eddy sings "O, du mein holder Abendstern" from *Tannhäuser*, in English.

The Great Lie, dir. Edmund Goulding. Mary Astor plays an airy concert pianist in a love triangle with an aviator. The Liebestod is heard on the soundtrack as she confronts the other woman (Bette Davis) at a post-concert gathering.

Stukas, dir. Karl Ritter. A Nazi propaganda film about dive-bomber squadrons, containing an extended sequence shot at Bayreuth. When a pilot named Hans is shot down and wounded, he falls into a depressed, lethargic state. A restorative trip to Bayreuth is prescribed to restore him. At first, Hans seems uninterested, but he perks up when he hears the brass section intone Siegfried's horn call during the intermission. Inside, the sound of "Siegfried's Rhine Journey" electrifies him: he leans forward, his eyes glowing, his mind filled with happy memories of comradeship. He returns to battle, his eyes still gleaming as he sings the "Stuka Song" with his comrades: "We are the Black Hussars of the air, / The Stukas, the Stukas, the Stukas . . ."[36]

The Hard-Boiled Canary, dir. Andrew L. Stone. This curious musical comedy set at the Interlochen music camp, in which a burlesque dancer trains to become a classical musician, opens with the surprising sound of the *Rienzi* Overture. *Tannhäuser* is also heard.

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[35] For an analysis, see Lawrence Kramer, "Contesting Wagner: The *Lohengrin* Prelude and Anti-anti-Semitism," *19th-Century Music* 25:2-3 (2001-02), pp. 190–211.

[36] For more, see Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Bayreuth and the War Effort: Karl Ritter's *Stukas*," in *Music Theater as Global Culture: Wagner's Legacy Today*, ed. Anno Mungen et al. (Königshausen & Neumann, 2017), pp. 41–50.

Sullivan's Travels, dir. Preston Sturges. A classic chase sequence in this brainy screwball comedy involves a thirteen-year-old in a go-cart being chased by bus. The accompaniment is the "Ride" mixed with Rossini's *William Tell* overture.

The Lady Eve, dir. Preston Sturges. Barbara Stanwyck, as a high-end con artist, expertly manipulates the naïve Henry Fonda in the guise of the Lady Eve. Their wedding unfolds to what can only be described as the Bridal Chorus arranged in an over-the-top, pseudo-Wagnerian manner, with the *Parsifal* bell motif woven in for good measure. During a train trip after the wedding, Stanwyck confesses she eloped with a stable boy when she was young. He pardons her, saying, "If there's one thing that distinguishes a man from a beast, it's the ability to understand, and understanding, forgive." The Pilgrims' Chorus serves as accompaniment. But the music breaks off when Eve brings up another of her affairs, with Hermann. Various other names follow, to the point where Eve is revealed as a Venus. As Elisabeth Bronfman points out, in this version of the Tannhäuser legend, Elisabeth and Venus turn out to be the "same dame."[37]

Cottage to Let, dir. Anthony Asquith. Released in the US as *Bombsight Stolen*. Nazi spies in England use the *Meistersinger* Prelude to cover their conversation.

Goofy Groceries, dir. Bob Clampett. Quotes the giants' motif from the *Ring*.

That Uncertain Feeling, dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Another Lubitsch triangle, now with Douglas as the cuckolded husband and Merle Oberon as the drifting wife, who strikes up a relationship with an eccentric, irritating pianist played by Burgess Meredith. "I am a complete individualist," Meredith says. "I'm against communism, capitalism, fascism, Nazism. I am against everything and everybody. I hate my fellow man and he hates me." Douglas has invited members of a Hungarian mattress firm to dinner, hoping to close a deal. Oberon invites Meredith along, expecting him to provide musical entertainment and aesthetic conversation. His dinner-table chatter includes a scathing dismissal of Wagner. "You mean not even *Lohengrin*?" "Especially not *Lohengrin*. I give you all of Wagner—except one passage in *Tristan* that's really good but you never hear it played right." "Perhaps someday I could hear you play it as it should be played." "Perhaps." Meredith disrupts the dinner with a severe program consisting not only of Beethoven's Pathéthique but also of "Hoff's eleven variations on the second theme of the first movement, then my own variations on Hoff's variations." By the end of the evening, which extends into the following morning, only Oberon remains. When Meredith is done, he rises and goes in for a kiss. Oberon initially demurs, but when the two move out of the frame he apparently has more success. After a beat, he comes into the shot, sits back down at the piano, and launches into climatic passage of the Liebestod—a rare case of Wagner being used as a punchline. Later, as Meredith becomes increasingly grating, he announces himself as "Wotan, the god of gods," singing to a *Flying Dutchman*-like motif.

The Little Foxes, dir. William Wyler. In a dinner-party scene toward the beginning of this Lillian Hellman adaptation, a Southern cotton-mill aristocrat recalls that her parents used to go to Europe every summer to hear music: "Once Mama met Mr. Wagner—the composer, you know.

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[37] Elisabeth Bronfen, "Hollywood's Wagner: The Return to/of the Ordinary," in *Jenseits von Bayreuth: Richard Wagner heute*, ed. Stefan Börnchen et al. (Fink, 2014), p. 259.

Mrs. Wagner gave Mama and Papa a signed program." A trip to Bayreuth is implied, although the fact that Birdie Hubbard's father died in the Civil War makes that impossible.

Million Dollar Baby (1941). Ronald Reagan, playing a headstrong young composer, bashes out "The Ride of the Valkyries" on a boarding-house piano, to the annoyance of May Robson, playing an heiress in disguise. "You desecrate Wagner," Robson says. "Wagner was a ham," Reagan replies, switching over to Chopin.

1942

The First of the Few, dir. Leslie Howard. Released in the US as *Spitfire*. William Walton's score weaves in *Ring* motifs: the Nibelung anvils, Wotan's Spear.

Secret Mission, dir. Harold French. When Allied operatives slip into France to gather intelligence on German fortifications, they are puzzled to encounter an armored truck blasting the Pilgrims' Chorus from a loudspeaker. They later commandeer the truck for their own purposes.

A Night to Remember, dir. Richard Wallace. When amateur detective Brian Aherne burns a roast in the oven, the Magic Fire music plays.

Reunion in France, dir. Jules Dassin. Joan Crawford's character is having an affair with industrialist played by Philip Dorn, who seems to be in league with the Nazis. After the occupation, they arrive at a function attended by Nazi officers, and Crawford is alarmed to hear familiar strains:

> Crawford: Robert, isn't that the march from the *Meistersinger*?
> Dorn: All Wagner sounds alike to me.
> Crawford: But it's Hitler's favorite melody.
> Dorn: What did you expect, the *Marseillaise*?

Later, a violinist defiantly plays Mendelssohn in the streets of occupied Paris. When a Gestapo agent suspiciously asks him what he's playing, he says it's Wagner.

Hobby Horse-Laffs, dir. Norman McCabe. In this Looney Tunes short, the sword motif from the *Ring* serves as theme music for Prof. Blooper, who imitates musical instruments.

Vertigine, dir. Guido Brignone. The great tenor Beniamino Gigli stars as a version of himself, though the plot centers on complications of his daughter's love life. Early on he sings an Italian version of "Winterstürme," from *Walküre*, at an outdoor concert in Venice. Gigli was a favorite of Mussolini's and also sang for Hitler. His rendition of Wagner here may symbolize the Italian-German alliance during the Second World War.

Valley of Vanishing Men, dir. Spencer Gordon Bennet. This Wild Bill Elliott serial uses the "Ride" as a theme.

Journey for Margaret, dir. W. S. Van Dyke. Uses the *Tannhäuser* Overture in the background of one scene.

Madame Spy, dir. Roy William Neill. Uses the "Ride."

For Me and My Gal, dir. Busby Berkeley. Uses the "Ride."

1943

Edge of Darkness, dir. Lewis Milestone. A drama of a Norwegian fishing village rebelling against the Nazi occupation. Franz Waxman's score quotes Siegfried's Funeral Music when the Nazi commander kills himself at the end, but, as Scott Paulin observes in an essay on wartime American Wagner allusions, it is a dulled version of the theme, which "leaves the German demise devoid of glory or redemption."[38]

Isle of Forgotten Sins, dir. Edgar G. Ulmer. A deep-sea diving expedition in quest of three million dollars of sunken gold is accompanied by the *Rheingold* prelude and the Rhinemaidens music, with wordless choral lines added and meandering modulations added. Leo Erdody's score also quotes the Hunding and Giants motifs—the latter becoming prominent when villainous elements plot to seize the gold from the divers.

Batman, dir. Lambert Hillyer. An adaptation of the *Rienzi* Overture serves as theme music for this fifteen-part superhero serial.

Why We Fight, dir. Frank Capra. A series of documentary-style propaganda films intended for U.S. soldiers, completed in 1945. The Russian-born composer Dimitri Tiomkin signed on as music supervisor. Less than five minutes in, we hear a musical answer to the question that dominates the introduction of the first episode, *Prelude to War*: Why have we gone to war? As the narrator speaks of a battle between a free world and an enslaved one, the orchestra intones Siegfried's principal theme from *Walküre*, in muted, ominous form.[39] That theme recurs dozens of times in the opening episodes, as in a staged scene of a Nazi official flourishing his gun on camera and speaking the line "Whenever I hear anyone mention the word culture, the first thing I do is reach for my gun." (The line, often attributed to Goebbels, actually comes from a 1933 play by a Nazi-sympathizing writer.) In "The Nazis Strike," a dissonant distortion of the Siegfried motif leads into a chaotic "Deutschland über Alles." According to Scott Paulin, the Nibelungen-Marsch occurs in *Prelude to War*, *War Comes to America*, and *Battle of Russia*; Brünnhilde's Immolation music in *Divide and Conquer* and *Battle of Britain*; and *The Flying Dutchman* in *Divide and Conquer*.

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, dir. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. As the website www.dailyscript.com reveals, Pressburger's script for this classic epic of a British soldier rising through the ranks originally incorporated a series of mentions of what is identified as "Brünhilde's great and difficult soprano solo in Wagner's 'Walkury.'" During the Boer War, a group of soldiers are said to have listened constantly to a recording at their blockhouse, so that the music became a signal among them. Later, Clive Candy, the central figure, uses the music to

[38] Paulin, "Piercing Wagner," p. 231.
[39] Scott D. Paulin, "Piercing Wagner: The *Ring* in *Golden Earrings*," in Joe and Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema*, p. 247.

taunt a German spy who was held prisoner at the blockhouse. It's not clear exactly what selection the script had in mind, but in the end the music was changed to "Je suis Titania" from Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon*. It is easy imagine why this change was made: the idea of British soldiers making Wagner their personal leitmotif — and arousing the ire of a German by playing it — might have confused wartime audiences who were becoming accustomed to associations between Wagner and German malice.

Slightly Dangerous, dir. Wesley Ruggles. In this Lana Turner vehicle, Robert Young plays a desperate store manager who, while trying to get the attention of his former employee at a concert, nearly plunges over a balcony. Onstage a soprano is singing Brünnhilde's "Ho jo to ho!"

L'Eternel Retour, dir. Jean Delannoy. Jean Cocteau's script is a retelling of the Tristan story in modern dress, incorporating early versions of the legend as well as Wagnerian Liebestod imagery. As Cocteau's note indicates, the title refers to Nietzsche's concept of the "eternal return." Although no Wagner is heard, the score, by Georges Auric, seems to allude glancingly to the Siegfried fate motif. The film had its première in Vichy France and is in some ways uncomfortably in tune with Fascist aesthetics, particularly in the fetishizing of the beauty of the blond lovers (Madeleine Sologne and Jean Marais). But there is nothing overtly propagandistic about the work.

This Land Is Mine, dir. Jean Renoir. A drama of the German occupation of a small French town. When a German commandant enters the city hall and the Nazi flag is raised, the *Ring* spear motif leads to the "Ride." An ominously modified "Ride" motif is matched to a sign about civil law under Nazis.

Above Suspicion, dir. Richard Thorpe. Music by Bronislaw Kaper. An American couple is sent on a spy mission in Europe. At a concert in Salzburg, a pianist friend of theirs is playing Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1. He tells the couple they probably won't like the concert: "Oh this conductor Klopf is terrible . . . He's noisy. You know how the Germans love noise." There's a cut to a cymbal crash and the *Rienzi* overture. The implied ideological opposition between Wagner and Liszt is undercut by the fact that the latter's *Les Préludes* was being used as the title theme for wartime newsreels.

Hi Diddle Diddle. dir. Andrew L. Stone. In this eccentric screwball comedy set in wartime, the walls of a Wagner soprano's apartment are decorated with scenes of the composer picnicking with his family and his dogs. When, at the end, the soprano's guests begin discordantly signing the Pilgrims' Chorus from *Tannhäuser*, the wallpaper comes to animated life and a horrified Wagner flees the scene, with barking dogs joining the musicale.

The Dancing Masters, dir. Malcolm St. Clair. In this Laurel and Hardy farce, a sped-up "Ride" plays during a madcap rollercoaster sequence.

Hangmen Also Die, dir. Fritz Lang. Co-written by Bertolt Brecht, scored by Hanns Eisler. As Sally Bick notes, a schmaltzy arrangement of "O du, mein holder Abendstern" is pegged to a decadent Gestapo agent.[40]

Three Hearts for Julia, dir. Richard Thorpe. The "Ride" is heard during an opening title-theme montage. Ann Sothern portrays the frustrated wife of a foreign correspondent who thinks of leaving him. She plays harp in an all-female orchestra led by the émigré conductor Anton Ottoway (Felix Bressart), who feels that he is lowering himself to vulgar fare. At a "Ride" rehearsal, Ottaway becomes frustrated by what the sexist script presents as female distractions—one player taking her baby to doctor, another screaming when she sees a rat. When a player powders her nose, Ottaway asks, "Must you powder your nose in the middle of Wagner?" She answers: "But I have a four-bar rest, Mr. Ottoway, and I've been watching the score." When Sothern falls behind, the conductor snaps, "It's very interesting, but the way Wagner wrote it is very nice, too." In the end, Ottoway overcomes his snobbery and acquiesces in conducting good old American pop music, such as "I've Been Working on the Railroad."

Battle for Music, dir. Donald Taylor. This docudrama about the London Philharmonic's struggle to keep playing during the war begins with the motto theme of Beethoven's Fifth—music that came to be associated with "V for Victory"—and then segues to the final part of the Liebestod, which a soprano is singing on stage. The onscreen text indicates that this is meant to represent a *Tristan* performance at Covent Garden, just before the German invasion of Poland: "The curtain is falling on a world threatened and menaced by Nazi aggression. But the audience forgets the tragedy of Europe in the magic of great music."

Som du vill ha mej, dir. Gösta Cederlund. Employs *Tristan und Isolde*.

The Voice That Thrilled the World, dir. Jean Negulesco. This short documentary history of sound on film includes the New York Philharmonic playing the *Tannhäuser* Overture, from 1926 (see above).

Spies, dir. Chuck Jones. A War Department training short starring the infamous Private Snafu, whose mistakes show trainees what not to do. Here, *Rienzi* plays during a U-boat attack that Snafu has failed to prevent. Script by Dr. Seuss.

Scrap Happy Daffy, dir. Frank Tashlin. A Daffy short dealing with the wartime imperative of scrap-metal collecting and with Nazi attempts to foil it. *Rienzi* again underscores German aggression, with strains of Beethoven's Fifth mixed in.

Der Fuehrer's Face, dir. Jack Kinney. This anti-fascist Donald Duck vehicle begins with the strains of the *Meistersinger* Prelude, soon rudely cut off.

Daffy The Commando, dir. Friz Freleng. The giants' music from *Rheingold* accompanies a German officer.

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[40] Sally Bick, "A Double Life in Hollywood: Hanns Eisler's Score for the Film *Hangmen Also Die* and the Covert Expressions of a Marxist Composer," *Musical Quarterly* 93:1 (2010), pp. 124–25.

Disney Education for Death, dir. Clyde Geronimi. A Nazi child is taught that the wicked witch in the Sleeping Beauty story is Democracy, that the princess is Germany, and that Hitler is the prince who rides to the rescue, with the "Ride" accompanying him. The comically bulky princess, outfitted in a valkyrie helmet, sings "Heil Hitler' to the "Ride" tune.

Five Graves to Cairo, dir. Billy Wilder. A frustrated Italian general looks forward to the end of the war, when he can lie in his bathtub and "sing and sing and sing . . . *but not Wagner!*"

1944

Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips, dir. Friz Freleng. In this racist propaganda short, Carl Stalling's score uses Siegfried's minor-key motif to affirm the heroism of Bugs Bunny as an American hero killing Japanese, as Neil Lerner points out.[41]

Snafuperman, dir. Friz Freleng. *Rienzi* again accompanies the incompetent antics of Private Snafu, although here it symbolizes his misplaced grandiosity rather than any Nazi presence.

Christmas Holiday, dir. Robert Siodmak. This moody wartime noir contains one of the great Wagner scenes in the history of movies. The unlucky Abigail (Deanna Durbin) meets her shadowy husband Robert Manette (Gene Kelly) at a concert in the old Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles, which was modeled on Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler's Auditorium in Chicago and had some resemblance to the layout of the Bayreuth Festspiehaus. An orchestral version of the Liebestod plays unbroken for two minutes and thirty-five seconds as the camera moves from the orchestra to the gallery seats where the future lovers are sitting. The Liebestod is heard again at the end of the picture, as Robert dies.

Henry Aldrich's Little Secret, dir. Hugh Bennett. Uses the "Ride."

Make Your Own Bed, dir. Peter Godfrey. Uses "O du, mein holder Abendstern."

Lifeboat, dir. Alfred Hitchcock. When a ship is torpedoed by a U-boat, survivors rescue a German sailor (Walter Slezak). At one point, the African-American character Joe (Canada Lee) is seen playing the Prize Song on his tin flute. This obliquely hints that the sailor is not the innocent conscript he purposes to be: he is, in fact, the U-Boat's captain. An added irony: Slezak was the son of the celebrated Wagner tenor Leo Slezak.

Tunisian Victory, dir. Frank Capra et al. Uses Sonntag's *Nibelungen-Marsch*.

The Uninvited, dir. Lewis Allen. In one scene of this horror picture set in a haunted house on the cliffs of Cornwall, the Liebestod plays on a turntable.

Love Story, dir. Leslie Arliss. In this British drama, a dying concert pianist (Margaret Lockwood) falls in love with a wounded RAF pilot who is losing his sight (Stewart Granger). A climactic concert scene at Royal Albert Hall begins with the strains of the *Lohengrin* Act I Prelude.

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[41] Neil Lerner, "Reading Wagner in *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*," in Joe and Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema*, p. 222.

Bluebeard, dir. Edgar G. Ulmer. Leo Erdody's score curiously quotes the Fliedermonolog motif from *Meistersinger* during a conversation between the murderer-artist Bluebeard (John Carradine) and his complicit art-dealer Jean Lamarté (the distinguished Austrian émigré actor Ludwig Stössel). The motif is associated several more times with the dealer, often intermingled with Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Enemy of Women, dir. Alfred Zeisler. In this low-budget biopic of Joseph Goebbels, music from *Meistersinger* plays as an actress practices her lines with the infatuated Goebbels, then cuts off when he makes an unwelcome pass. Score by Artur Guttmann.

The Hitler Gang, dir. John Farrow. In this semi-documentary portrait of Hitler's rise to power, Wagner makes two appearances: first, Geli Raubal, Hitler's doomed niece, plays the shepherd's song from *Tannhäuser* at the piano, and later a functionary bangs out "The Ride of the Valkyries" as Hitler steels himself for the 1934 purge.

1945

Den allvarsamma leken, dir. Rune Carlsten. Uses Brünnhilde's "Ho jo to ho!"

Boston Blackie's Rendezvous, dir. Arthur Dreifuss. In this nominally comedic crime drama, a serial strangler (Steve Cochran) takes a woman hostage (Nina Foch) while a reformed jewel thief (Chester Morris) tracks him down. In an oblique association between Wagner and murderous impulses, Cochran switches a radio from swing to the Prize Song from *Meistersinger*, explaining: "I hate popular music, it upsets you, makes you think in the wrong direction." As in *Babes in Arms*, the moral calculus of this musical scheme is undermined by the racist blackface routine that Morris performs as he insinuates his way into the murderer's hotel.

A Tale of Two Mice, dir. Frank Tashlin. In this Merrie Melodies installment, the *Rienzi* Overture is heard as two mice attempt to extract a piece of cheese that is being guarded by a cat.

Herr Meets Hare, dir. Friz Freleng. Bugs Bunny, lost on his way to Las Vegas, pops up in the Black Forest. Various Wagner quotations in Carl Stalling's score illustrate the rascally rabbit's German journey: a bit of *The Flying Dutchman* plays when Bugs pops out of the ground; a snippet resembling the *Ring* dragon motif accompanies a gun-toting German hunter in the woods; Siegfried's theme resounds in triumphal mode as Bugs disguises himself as Hitler, drawing the attention of an obsequiously saluting Hermann Goering; and a bit of the Prize Song plays as Goering pleads with the ersatz Führer. A famous image of Bugs in Valkyrie costume riding a fat unicorn is accompanied, unexpectedly, by the Pilgrims' Chorus.

1946

The Whale Who Wanted to Sing at the Met, dir. Clyde Geronimi and Hamilton Luske. The repertory of a vocally ambitious cetacean includes the love music from Act II of *Tristan*, voiced by Nelson Eddy. The "Ride" plays when a greedy Met director chases him down and harpoons him; Wotan's farewell is heard when a sad gull mourns his whale friend. Included in the Disney anthology film *Make Mine Music*.

Son of the Guardsman, dir. Derwin Abrahams. A low-budget fifteen-part serial on a Robin Hood theme, although Robin himself is not a character. When the outlaws emerge from Sherwood Forest in order to fight the predations of the evil Sir Edgar, the "Ride" plays, and thereafter it serves as a call-to-arms motif in their fight against "oppression and injustice."

The Stranger, dir. Orson Welles. A schoolteacher in a sleepy American town, played by Welles, delivers a grim message about the legacy of Wagner: "The German sees himself as the innocent victim of world envy and hatred, conspired against, set upon by inferior peoples, inferior nations. He cannot admit to error. much less to wrongdoing, not the German. ... No! He still follows his warrior gods marching to Wagnerian strains, his eyes still fixed upon the fiery sword of Siegfried, and he knows subterranean meeting places that you don't believe in." That message is only reinforced when the schoolteacher is unmasked as a Nazi fugitive: he has been inadvertently telling the truth about the everlasting German menace. To drive home the point, Welles includes documentary footage of Nazi death camps, confronting American audiences with evidence from which they may have preferred to look away.

Humoresque, dir. Jean Negulesco, A dissipated socialite (Joan Crawford) falls desperately in love with a hard-boiled violin virtuoso (John Garfield). At the end, Crawford walks into the ocean while Garfield plays an arrangement of the Liebestod on the radio. Wagner swamps the soundtrack for ten full minutes, courtesy of Frank Waxman's *Tristan und Isolde Fantasie*, peculiarly scored for violin, piano, and orchestra. (The piano part is inserted in order to feature the pianist-composer Oscar Levant, who plays Garfield's cynical sidekick.) Marcia Citron notes that Crawford's final agonies reflect different phases of the text that no voice is singing: she blocks her ears at the moment Isolde says that Tristan's tones "pierce her through," and her plunge into the water is aligned with Isolde's "to drown, to sink."[42] The playwright Clifford Odets, who co-wrote the script with Zachary Gold, was a keen concertgoer and record collector

I've Always Loved You, dir. Frank Borzage. Myra, a young pianist from a Pennsylvania farm (Catherine McLeod), falls under the spell of the pianist and conductor Leopold Goranoff (Philip Dorn), who becomes envious of her ability. In one scene, Goranoff is seducing a young blonde woman when Myra, herself feeling envious, pounds out the Liebestod so vehemently that it becomes a distraction.

Two Sisters from Boston, dir. Henry Koster. Lauritz Melchior sings the Prize Song from *Meistersinger* in this MGM musical.

Holiday in Mexico, dir. George Sidney. The Spanish brother-and-sister pianists José and Amparo Iturbi, who appeared in a number of MGM musicals in the forties, are enjoying an intimate moment playing the Liebestod when they are interrupted by their grandchildren, at which point they switch to a boogie-woogie version of "Three Blind Mice."

Rhapsody Rabbit, dir. Friz Freleng. In one of the most musically sophisticated of the Merrie Melodies, Bugs Bunny, outfitted as a virtuoso pianist in tails, performs Liszt's Second Hungarian

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[42] Marcia Citron, "'Soll ich lauschen?': Love-Death in *Humoresque*," in Joe and Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema*, p. 173.

Rhapsody, with inevitable excursions and digressions. Before he walks onstage, we hear the triumphant treatment of the Siegfried theme from Siegfried's Funeral Music.

Okay for Sound. A short celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Vitaphone process. Again we see the Philharmonic's pioneering *Tannhäuser* Overture from 1926.

Klockorna i Gamla Sta'n (*The Bells in Old Town*), dir. Ragnar Hyltén-Cavallius. In this Swedish film, neighbors who love classical music and jazz respectively move from conflict to friendship. Includes music from *Lohengrin*.

The Searching Wind, dir. William Dieterle. In this Lillian Hellman-scripted story of an American diplomat appeasing fascists, Victor Young's score makes heavy use of Wagnerian signification, notwithstanding his director's love of the composer. Siegfried's motif accompanies a headline about Germany being wooed by the League of Nations. Further quotations from and variations on the *Ring* are heard in a scene where Sylvia Sidney's character, a reporter in the mold of Dorothy Thompson, witnesses Jews being beat up by Stormtroopers. Darkened versions of the Siegfried theme underscore several later moments of Nazi malfeasance.

1947

Brute Force, dir. Jules Dassin. Hume Cronyn plays a sadistic Wagner-listening prison warden who subscribes to a social-Darwinist philosophy of "The weak must die." In a climactic interrogation of a prisoner in his office, he plays the *Tannhäuser* Overture on his turntable and he turns up the volume while he beats the victim with a rubber hose. The transition to Venusberg music gives a kind of erotic charge to his sadism.

Golden Earrings, dir. Mitchell Leisen. A spy drama involving the extraction of a poison-gas formula from Nazi Germany. As Scott Paulin points out, citations of Wagner shift in Victor Young's score from a stereotypical identification with Nazism to something more ambiguous. When English agents escape from the clutches of a German operative, they do so under the cover of a Hitler broadcast on the radio, which is heralded by the heroic *Götterdämmerung* version of Siegfried's theme. After the fashion of Max Steiner in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* and the *Why We Fight* composers, Young subjects that theme to dissonant variations as the Nazis search for the escapees. But the same motif acquires a more positive connotation when it is linked to the Gypsy character played by Marlene Dietrich, who comes to the escapees' aid.[43]

The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer, dir. Irving Reis. A brainy, hyper-romantic seventeen-year-old girl (Shirley Temple), who longs for a "knight in shining armor," falls in love with a handsome, vaguely louche artist who lectures at her school (Cary Grant). In one queasy fantasy sequence, Temple imagines Grant in the proverbial knightly suit, with *Lohengrin* on the soundtrack. The association is carried further with citations of the Siegfried motif. Strains of *Lohengrin* return when Temple insinuates herself into Grant's apartment when he's not there. *Siegfried* sounds again at the end when Grant finds true love with Myrna Loy.

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[43] Scott D. Paulin, "Piercing Wagner: The *Ring* in *Golden Earrings*," in Joe and Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema*, pp. 234–45

My Wild Irish Rose, dir. David Butler. In this musical biopic of the Irish-American singer Chauncey Olcott, the "Ride" is heard during a discus-throwing scene.

Variety Girl, dir. George Marshall. This variety musical uses the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude.

Lured, dir. Douglas Sirk. In this baroque noir, Lucille Ball plays a plucky entertainer who is helping the police find a Baudelaire-loving serial killer. She answers a classified ad placed by a mentally unhinged costume designer (Boris Karloff), who dresses Ball for a fashion show that is taking place only in his deluded mind. The audience consists of a dog and several dummies. The accompanying music, coming from a Victrola, is the Entry of the Guests at the Wartburg from *Tannhäuser*. When the needle becomes struck in a groove, Karloff flies into a violent rage, from which Ball escapes. Here, Wagner is a feint: the real killer seems to prefer Schubert.

Salt Water Tabby, dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. In this Tom and Jerry cartoon, the accident-prone feline experiences misadventures at the seashore. Scott Bradley's score quotes the *Flying Dutchman* Overture when Tom encounters rough seas.

The Egg and I, dir. Chester Erskine. The *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude figures in this romantic comedy starring Claudette Colbert and Fred MacMurray.

Carnegie Hall, dir. Edgar G. Ulmer. This backstage drama of an Irish immigrant and her trumpet-playing son contains footage of Bruno Walter conducting the New York Philharmonic in the *Meistersinger* Prelude.

Forest Murmurs, dir. Slavko Vorkapich. A visual tone poem by the Serbian-born experimental filmmaker and theorist, using illustrating Wagner's music with a montage of forest imagery.

1948

Letter from an Unknown Woman, dir. Max Ophuls. This lyrical Ophuls masterpiece, adapted from a Stefan Zweig novella, incorporates two subtle Wagner references. Lisa, played by Joan Fontaine, is in love with a self-absorbed playboy pianist (Louis Jourdan) who fails to recognize her when she keeps reappearing in his life. She first becomes obsessed with the pianist as a girl, when he is living next door in Vienna. Determined to learn more about music so that she can approach him, she browses in a music library, putting a Wagner score on the shelf and taking down one by Mozart. Later, in Linz, her mother wants her to marry a stiff but respectable lieutenant; as the latter makes his proposal, in a town square in Linz, a brass band is tootling "O du, mein holder Abendstern." Neither scene is to be found in the Zweig novella, in which the male protagonist is an author, not a musician. V. F. Perkins, observing that Linz was the city in which Hitler grew up, proposes that the Wagner references have an antagonistic slant, with the shelving of the score marking a refusal and the brass-band rendition suggesting Wagnerian cultural militarism.[44] But the film fails to support these readings. When Lisa replaces the score on the shelf, she indeed gives it a little shove—not out of any apparent disgust but simply because the volumes are tightly packed on the shelf. As for the Linz scene, the surrounding dialogue makes clear that Lisa is suffering from the absence of Viennese culture—and, with it,

[44] V. F. Perkins, "Ophuls contra Wagner and Others," *Movie* 36 (2000), pp. 73– 79.

her beloved—and that the military-band rendition of *Tannhäuser* is a commentary on the city's supposed provinciality. The musicians are much more in their element when they launch into "The Radetsky March." (In fact, Linz had a good opera house, where Hitler saw his first Wagner performances.) Incidentally, pictures of Joseph Joachim, Brahms, and Mahler hang next to the pianist's instrument in his studio. His signature piece is Liszt's "Un sospiro."

Unfaithfully Yours, dir. Preston Sturges. Another wry, knowing deployment of Wagner in the films of Sturges, who went to Bayreuth when he was a boy, in the company of his mother, a close friend of Isadora Duncan's. Rex Harrison plays Alfred de Carter, a grandiose conductor who thinks his young wife, Daphne (Linda Darnell), is having an affair with his handsome secretary (Karl Kreuger) Three pieces on a concert program cause him to fantasize different solutions to the problem: Rossini's *Semiramide* Overture for an intricately plotted murder; *Tannhäuser* for a large-hearted act of forgiveness; and Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* for a game of Russian roulette that ends in his suicide. In the Wagner sequence, Harrison muses wisely upon the unquenchable nature of desire: "As if we could control our love." He voices his wife's attraction to the "beautiful young man," saying, "See how gently the tendrils of his lustrous hair curl behind his ears." He takes the blame for the affair: "I am deeply ashamed of what I've done to you." And when she breaks down crying, he says, "Oh, don't cry my darling. I couldn't understand music as well as I do if I didn't understand the human heart a little. Neither of you has done anything wrong. Youth belongs to youth, and beauty to beauty. I want you to be rich, comfortable, and free . . . That little head was never made to worry." Where upon he writes check for a hundred thousand dollars. As the scholar Martin Marks observes, Harrison's character makes perverse use of *Tannhäuser*, where the male is the one seeking forgiveness: "*He* forgives *her*, because she is the adulterous one, and he 'redeems' her both from sin and from material needs. He has the noble soul; she is nothing more than a prop, a hand to be held and kissed."[45] Earlier, the Liebestod is heard in a sequence showing the couple making love. Later in the film, the Wagner returns as Alfred makes absurd attempts to carry out his fantasies. Here, as Marks points out, the musical cues resemble the manic cartoons in which Wagner and others were so often quoted. Daphne is, of course, blameless, and in the end she nobly forgives him for his absurdity. With typical deftness, Sturges deflates the grandeur of classical music while respecting its allure. "Music does strange things sometimes," Alfred says. "Very strange things."

A Foreign Affair, dir. Billy Wilder. Members of the postwar occupying authority in Germany are investigating the Nazi past of a cabaret singer played by Marlene Dietrich. They watch a newsreel of a *Lohengrin* opening night, at which Hitler is seen kissing the singer's hand. "They fiddled big while Berlin burned," one comments. "*Lohengrin*, you know, swan song," says another.

Road House, dir. Jean Negulesco. Ida Lupino, playing a roadhouse singer in this vintage noir, recalls in one scene that when she was young her mother wanted her to be an opera singer. The memory is prompted by hearing Elsa's Dream from *Lohengrin* on the radio.

The Snake Pit, dir. Anatol Litvak. This drama of a woman suffering from psychological crisis (Olivia de Havilland) contains potent scenes of harsh conditions at mental institutions—a protest

[45] Martin Marks, "Screwball Fantasia: Classical Music in *Unfaithfully Yours*," *19th-Century Music* 34:3 (2011), pp. 237–70.

that helped to bring about systemic changes. Flashbacks show de Havilland's early relationship with her kindly husband (Mark Stevens), who is unaware that she is suffering from what the film interprets as feelings of guilt over her father's death. We see the couple at a concert where the *Tannhäuser* Overture is being played, and Stevens relates: "It didn't take us long to find out that we liked the same mind of things. We liked music—the same kind of music."

Pitfall, dir. André de Toth. In this noir about an insurance man who gets caught up in adultery and homicide, Dick Powell, playing the lead, finds that his son has had a bad dream after reading a comic book. The son asks, "Daddy, what makes a dream?" As Powell answers, Wagner's "Träume," from the Wesendonck Lieder, begins playing: "The mind, mostly. The mind is like a very wonderful camera . . . Evidently, from the day we are born the mind takes pictures and stores them away. Now and then one of those pictures comes loose in our sleep and that become a dream. So, the trick is, take only good pictures and have only good dreams."

Bugs Bunny Rides Again, dir. Friz Freleng. Carl Stalling's score briefly quotes the Norns music from *Götterdämmerung* during a confrontation between Bugs and Yosemite Sam.

Bill and Coo, dir. Dean Riesner. An hour-long film in which most of the actors are trained birds, from the aviary of George Burton. When an evil crow named the Blue Menace terrorizes the bird town of Chirpendale, Wagner symbolizes his "fiendish inspiration": first the Fate theme from the *Ring*, then the "Ride" during a fire sequence. The imagery plays upon war documentaries about the Blitzkrieg, with the innocent birds huddled in an underground shelter. Later, the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude introduces an Iron Jaw act at a bird circus.

On Our Merry Way, dir. Leslie Fenton, King Vidor, George Stevens, John Huston. This anthology film includes a segment with Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart as touring jazz musicians. At a talent contest, a trombonist plays a bit of the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude.

1949

It's a Great Feeling, dir. David Butler. A backstage Hollywood musical comedy starring Doris Day, Dennis Morgan, Jack Carson, and numerous stars in cameos. When Day and Morgan go a concert at the Hollywood Bowl, the Prelude Act III of *Lohengrin* serves as an intro to the duet "Blame My Absent-Minded Heart." Fortunately, the two are sitting on the hillside in back of the regular seating — seemingly the same place where Fred MacMurray and Joan Heather listen to Schubert in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* — and therefore do not disturb serious Wagnerians in the audience. After Carson interrupts, the *Meistersinger* overture is briefly heard. The Lohengrin turns out to be the prelude to the film's concluding wedding scene, at which the Bridal Chorus is heard: Day has foregone a Hollywood career in favor of marriage to her hometown sweetheart, who is played by Errol Flynn.

So You Want to Be Popular, dir. Richard L. Bare. This Joe McDoakes comedy short uses the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude.

Captain Video and His Video Rangers. The theme music for this sci-fi television series comes from the *Flying Dutchman* Overture.

Bye, Bye Bluebeard, dir. Arthur Davis. In this Merrie Melodies short, Carl Stalling's score quotes Kundry's riding motif from *Parsifal* as the fearsome Bluebeard is constructing a guillotine with which to behead Porky Pig.

A Ham in a Role, dir. Robert McKimson. In this Goofy Gophers short, Stalling quotes the Act I Transformation music from *Parsifal* as a Shakespearean dog is declaiming from *Richard III*.

Paying the Piper, dir. Robert McKimson. In this Porky Pig short, Stalling makes use of Wotan's Farewell from *Walküre* and the *Rienzi* Overture.

Long-Haired Hare, dir. Chuck Jones. In this Looney Tunes short, Bugs has a run-in with an operatic tenor, Giovanni Jones. During a concert at the Hollywood Bowl, Bugs asks for Jones's autograph and gives him a dynamite-stick pen with which to sign. Stalling elegantly weaves the inevitable explosion into the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude.

Rabbit Hood, dir. Chuck Jones. Stalling deploys the giants' music from the *Ring* at the outset of this this Merrie Melodies adaptation of the Robin Hood story, as we see a Wanted poster for a famous rabbit outlaw.

Curtain Razor, dir. Friz Freleng. One more moment in Stalling's very Wagnerian year: at Porky Pig's talent agency, a grasshopper with a tremendous tenor voice auditions by singing along to the *Lohengrin* Act III Prelude.

The Great Sinner, dir. Robert Siodmak. In this loose adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, Gregory Peck plays a writer who observes the goings-on at the casino in Wiesbaden and then becomes addicted to gambling in an attempt to save the woman with whom he has fallen in love. At the crucial moment when he resolves to take up the gambling life, the frenzy of the Venusberg music is heard on the soundtrack. A subsequent shot reveals that the music is coming from a spa orchestra, which had earlier been playing "The Radetzky March."

1950

The Lone Ranger: "The Whimsical Bandit," dir. Hollingsworth Morse. Scoring habits from the silent-film era seep into the early television era as the Lone Ranger gallops after a stolen stagecoach full of gold and the *Rienzi* Overture plays on the soundtrack. *The Birth of a Nation* is undoubtedly the model.

Caveman Inki, dir. Chuck Jones. This prehistoric Looney Tunes short quotes *Rienzi* during an earthquake sequence.

Nancy Goes to Rio, dir. Robert Z. Leonard. Uses the *Tannhäuser* Pilgrims' Chorus.

To be continued...