

RICHARD WAGNER



DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER

**Albert Dohmen
Ricarda Merbeth
Matti Salminen
Robert Dean Smith
Silvia Hablowetz
Steve Davislim**

Rundfunkchor Berlin

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin



Marek Janowski

Live recording
of the concert performance
in the Berlin Philharmonie
on 13 November, 2010

Der fliegende Holländer WWV 63
(**The flying Dutchman / Le vaisseau fantôme**)

Daland, ein norwegischer Seefahrer

Matti Salminen, Bass
(*A Norwegian skipper*)

Senta, seine Tochter

Ricarda Merbeth, Sopran
(*His daughter*)

Erik, ein Jäger

Robert Dean Smith, Tenor
(*A hunter*)

Mary, Sentas Amme

Silvia Hablewitz, Mezzo-sopran
(*Senta's nurse*)

Steuermann

Steve Davislim, Tenor
(*Daland's steersman*)

Der Holländer

Albert Dohmen, Bass-baritone
(*The Dutchman*)

Matrosen des Norwegers (*Norwegian sailors*),
Die Mannschaft des fliegenden Holländers
(*Crew of the "Flying Dutchman"*),
Mädchen (*Maids*)

Rundfunkchor Berlin

Chorus Master: **Eberhard Friedrich**

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin

Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin

Wolfgang Hentrich, Concertmaster

Robin Engelen, Assistant conductor

conducted by **Marek Janowski**

Live recording of the concert performance in the Berlin Philharmonie
on 13 November, 2010

Executive Producers: Stefan Lang, Maria Grätzel & Job Maarse
Recording Producer: Job Maarse | Balance Engineer: Jean-Marie Geijsen
Recording team: Wolfram Nehls, Ientje Mooij, Thomas Monnerjahn
Editing: Ientje Mooij | Design: Netherlads

Act 1

1 Overture 10. 31

1. Introduction

2 Hojoje! Hojoje! Halloje! Ho! 5. 05

3 Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer (*Steuermann*) 4. 28

2. Rezitativ und Arie

4 Die Frist ist um (*Der Holländer*) 2. 31

5 Wie oft in Meeres tiefsten Schlund (*Der Holländer*) 8. 06

3. Szene, Duett und Chor

6 He! Holla! Steuermann (*Daland, Steuermann, Der Holländer*)
3. 41

7 Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen (*Der Holländer,*
Daland) 3. 58

8 Wie? Hör' ich recht? Meine Tochter sein Weib? (*Daland, Der Hol-*
länder) 6. 46

9 Südwind! Südwind! (*Steuermann, Matrosen, Daland, Der Hol-*
länder) 1. 59

10 Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer (*Matrosen*) 2. 10

Act 2

4. Szene, Lied und Ballade

11 Summ und brumm, du gutes Rädchen (*Mädchen, Mary*) 3. 31

12 Du böses Kind, wenn du nicht spinnst (*Mary, Mädchen, Senta*)
4. 28

13 Johohoe! Traft ihr das Schiff im Meere an (*Senta's Ballade*)

5. 49

14 Ach, wo weilt sie (*Mädchen, Senta, Mary*) 1. 16

15 Senta! Willst du mich verderben? (*Erik, Mädchen, Mary, Senta*)
1. 49

5. Duett

16 Bleib, Senta! Bleib nur einen Augenblick! (*Erik, Senta*) 8. 01

17 Auf hohem Felsen lag ich träumend (*Erik, Senta*) 4. 16

Disc 2 (5186 413)

6. Finale

1 Mein Kind, du siehst mich auf der Schwelle (*Daland, Senta*)

4. 16

2 Mögst du, mein Kind, den fremden Mann willkommen heissen

5. 30

(*Daland's Arie*)

3 Wie aus der Ferne längst vergang'ner Zeiten 6. 18

(*Duett Der Holländer, Senta*)

4 Wirst du des Vaters Wahl nicht schelten? (*Der Holländer, Senta*)

4. 53

5 Ein heil'ger Balsam meinen Wunden (*Der Holländer, Senta*)

1. 49

6 Verzeiht! Mein Volk hält draussen sich nicht mehr 1. 39
(*Daland, Senta, Der Holländer*)

Act 3

7 Entr'acte 0. 50

7. Szene und Chor

8 Steuermann, lass die Wacht!
(*Chor der Norwegischen Matrosen*) 2. 15

9 Mein! Seht doch an!
(*Mädchen, norwegische Matrosen, Steuermann*) 6. 49

10 Johohoe! Johohoe! Hoe! Hoe!
(*Mannschaft des Holländers, norwegische Matrosen*) 3. 18

8. Finale

11 Was musst' ich hören (*Erik, Senta*) 2. 10

12 Willst jenes Tags du nicht dich mehr entsinnen (*Eriks Kavatine*)
2. 55

13 Verloren! Ach, verloren! Ewig verlorne Heil (*Der Holländer, Erik,*
Senta) 2. 21

14 Erfahre das Geschick (*Der Holländer, Erik, Senta, Daland, Mary,*
Chor) 5. 21

Total playing time: 2. 06. 29

Ahasuerus and the Bartered Bride

They all do it. Senta and Elsa, Elisabeth and Isolde, Sieglinde and Brünnhilde, even Venus, Ortrud, Gutrune and Kundry: they break taboos, risk their all for extreme experiences, violate well-nigh sacred conventions. To this end, they are forced to fade away, pining for their lovers, sacrificing themselves for love, giving up everything for their heroes (who are also moribund, of course, after committing their own offenses).

Broken taboos, extreme experiences, and a radical treatment of conventions characterize the life story of Richard Wagner, as well as his characters and texts. Above all, they shape his music: indeed, this is what constitutes the polarizing fascination of his oeuvre to this day. One is aware of this, bar for bar, even with one's eyes closed: the corresponding images appear naturally, as it were by themselves.

"You are sure to know the fable of the Flying Dutchman. This is the story of a cursed ship, doomed never to reach harbour, sailing the seas since time immemorial... That timber ghost, that grim gray ship, named after the captain, a Dutchman who once swore by the devil that he would succeed in sailing around a promontory – whose name escapes me – in spite of the fierce storm blowing, even if it meant sailing until Doomsday. The devil took him at his word, and cursed him to wander the seas until the ending of time, unless redeemed by the love of a faithful woman. The devil – stupid as he is – did not believe that a woman could be faithful, thus he permitted the cursed captain to set foot on land once every seven years to seek a bride, thus gaining his redemption. Poor Dutchman! He was often only too happy to be liberated from the marriage itself and from his 'liberator,' and make his way back on board again."

*Heinrich Heine, From the Memoirs of
Mister von Schnabelewopski, Esq., 1831*

Despise me not, Tamino!

This can only happen to a man: to spontaneously fall in love with an image, without ever having met the object of his devotion. Oh, it happens every day, it has happened for thousands of years now, advertising strategists know this only too well: in fact, it is an almost compulsive, inevitable behavioural pattern. Why else would they insist on every, but every television magazine gracing its cover page each week with nubile young women? And why do chief editors rush to obey them, like a herd of synchronized cattle? Why do chocolate bars wrappers contain football cards? Where would the perfume industry be without its icons? And what about the church? This subtle business of desire and illusion – it works like nothing else in the world.

Anyone accusing Richard Wagner of randomly throwing together a story, or criticizing the characters in his plots – who appear to be linked to one another thanks to fate – should remember one thing: in addition to everything else, Wagner was (like Mozart) a shrewd psychologist, a connoisseur of both men and women, who happily leads us up the garden path just when we think we understand his intentions. How can the Dutchman want to marry a woman he has never even met, not even glimpsed in a portrait? Only the description provided by the father suffices to fire his passion. And what about Senta, the woman? She has yearned for years for the phantom sailor, whose image hangs on her wall, oil on canvas, framed in dark wood. This likeness is enchantingly beautiful, not only according to the man, but also to the woman. This is Wagner's mischievous lime twig, to which we ascend readily like little birds, under the spell of providence, which has destined both the Dutchman and Senta for one another.

The cunning connoisseur of human nature, Richard Wagner, conceived of his Flying Dutchman as a romantic opera with highly modern characters in which the storyline takes place against a timeless background. Yet at the same time, it seemed to evolve of its own accord. Fed up with his appointment as conductor in Riga, hastily fleeing from persistent creditors, literally shaken to bits by the stormy seas, urgently in need of an artistic perspective, he remembered a story of Heinrich Heine's that he had read in 1839. The satire "Memoirs of Mister von Schnabelewopski" contained not only an obscure, haunted skipper, who would be allowed to end his eternal drifting on the seas if he were "ensnared" by a female on land, but a complete three-act play, laid out with the greatest of ease. Both the ideas and the manner in which they were phrased made such an impression on the 27-year-old Wagner, that he incorporated some of them literally into his own work (and later "magnanimously" erased the records of the source). Of course, it was not Heine who invented the story of the Dutchman; however, he was the one to actually use it as a source for art, and for artistic enhancement.

Wagner and Heine

Once upon a time in Jerusalem, there was a simple cobbler named Ahasuerus. He refused to let Jesus Christ rest for a while on his doorstep as he passed by, struggling with the weight of the cross. Whereupon Jesus' disciples rebuked him, and Ahasuerus was doomed to wander for all times to bear witness for Jesus – against the Jews. He would find peace only upon the return of Jesus Christ at the end of time. The story of the Wandering Jew has been a propaganda tool used

by anti-Semites since the 17th century. In addition, both Gentile and Jew have adopted the story of the Wandering Jew, providing artistic elaborations of his destiny. It is by no means the case that the Jews would reject the accusation of the Christians as slander. It is just that the terrible crimes against the Jews, committed for centuries under the Christian flag, have turned the relationship between crime and punishment completely upside down.

The Jewish writer Heinrich Heine described himself as having a keen intellect, a sharp tongue, and a cutting pen. He never wanted to be anything but a good German poet. Yet this did not prevent him from portraying circumstances in Germany as they were, charging into the thick of things as does a journalist – perhaps even like a cartoonist – to battle against false piety and vain egoism. In their own most private thoughts, many up-right, non-Jewish Germans felt the same. However, was an impudent Jew permitted to think in such an uninhibited manner, let alone to speak his mind?

Richard Wagner felt profoundly empathetic towards Heinrich Heine. Friedrich Nietzsche has revealed this, especially in matters where Wagner contradicts this. And in 1869, disputing Wagner's pamphlet *Judaism in Music* (1850), Gustav Freytag concludes the following: "For the purpose of his pamphlet, he himself appears to be the greatest Jew." That would have been a compliment, had Wagner not so radically torn out his own roots, by accusing the Jews (and his sanctuary, the modern, sensual city of Paris, which was not in the least prudish) of all of the qualities that had made him what he was, a clear-sighted artist and a political visionary, no less sharp-tongued than Heine.

As he was so jealously eager to demonstrate his own greatness as unique and without preconceptions, Wagner did not enjoy much peace during his lifetime. As it was Heine, to whom he owed so much, to whom he was compared concerning alleged Jewish modernity, he needed to stamp this out once and for all. How better to shake off his supposed rival than by denouncing him! One can be comfortable in the eye of the storm only when one has aroused the storm oneself. Wagner pursues a demagogic projection, accuses the Jews of modernity without tradition, yet claims (under the guise of the mythical and ancient) the absolute novelty of his own art.

The plot

Heinrich Heine already cites the Flying Dutchman, the man without an anchor, the Wandering Jew of the ocean, condemned by God to journey without rest until the ending of time. Luckily, a merciful angel

obtains a small loophole for him: every seven years he is allowed to set foot on land in order to search for a faithful wife. Thus he has travelled the seas for centuries already ...

One day, the wanderer meets the Norwegian sailor Daland. The good man is astonished by the attitude of the Dutch captain, to whom wealth apparently means nothing. Spontaneously, he promises the hand of his daughter Senta to the stranger in return for chests of gold and precious stones. Fortunately, Senta is already emotionally prepared to meet her unknown groom. She has long been infatuated with the subject of an ancient portrait on the wall in her home, much to the derision of her girlfriends. Nothing can dissuade her from pursuing the phantom until it materializes into flesh and blood. With its help, she hopes to break loose from the confines of her existence. On the one hand, the man who will arrive could not be more wrong for her, as he is seeking "peace from the storms of life" (Wagner); on the other hand, he could not be more right, as only for him is it worthwhile her actually breaking loose from her previous life. Thus, the mutual declarations of love expressed at their first meeting sound credible. While the couple get to know one another, the Norwegian sailors break out the liquor: their Dutch 'colleagues' have seen it all before during the centuries, thus they are less inclined to celebrate. Now the troublemaker makes his appearance: Erik, a hunter from the mountains, has long courted Senta. He reminds them that, so far, his attentions had not been rejected. That is enough for the Dutchman: apparently, he is not destined to find peace, not even in the arms of this woman. Senta does the inevitable, diving into the water to marry the cursed captain on the bed of the sea.

Psychologists have diagnosed severe narcissistic disorders in both Senta and the Dutchman. In their opinion, the bizarre yearnings felt by each for the other have little to do with mutual love: rather, they are each primarily concerned with their personal feelings. And that is the reason why the girl is not even aware that her father has sold her off sight unseen to a stranger. That is also the only reason why the man does not hesitate to place a blind trust in the situation. Moreover, Wagner was one to thrive on gloomy doomsday prophecies and a fatalistic addiction to death. All this is probably true in general for his entire oeuvre, which, especially in his case, can not be separated from his private life. In this framework, he always manages – admittedly, in a virtuoso manner – to act in his own advantage.

When taking over the management of the Bayreuth Festival, director Hans Neuenfels passed on a succinct formula for success to Richard Wagner's great-granddaughters, Catherine and Eva Wagner-Pasquier: "You must be as ruthless and conniving, cunning, infuriat-

ing, demanding, luxury-loving, immoderate and ingenious as was he, Richard."

The origins

In Heine's version, Daland is depicted as a Scottish merchant, known as McDonald. And Senta is known as Catherine. But Wagner mixed the mythical with the biographical. During his adventurous flight from Riga in February 1839, his ship floundered on the Norwegian shore. In fact, not until 1848, when the royal Kapellmeister was seen on the barricades in Dresden, did they even issue an arrest warrant for him. It was the gross discrepancy between the artist's (often not insignificant) financial income, and his ever-opulent lifestyle that forced him repeatedly to desert a cherished environment in order to illegally cross a border, to stay in anonymous locations, to invent adventurous stories, and to dispatch secret requests for help.

At that time, he had fled from a mountain of debt in Riga together with his wife, the actress Minna Planer, who was four years his senior. At first they crossed the border to East Prussia without papers, then stowed away on a boat heading for London. On the way, a huge storm had come up, and the ship was forced to seek refuge in a number of remote Norwegian ports. The combination of one of these ports – Sandwike – with the bedtime stories of the sailors, and the above-mentioned novel by Heine led to Wagner writing a poetic text for a romantic opera, which he then decided to stage in Paris. Why Paris? Well, this city – Heine's adopted home, after Germany turned its back on him – was quite simply the modern metropolis of the 19th century. Wagner was to develop a love-hate relationship with this city that spurned him as much as he desired it.

At first, his request to stage the opera was turned down. And this forced Wagner on the one hand to seek other possible performance venues, and on the other hand, to "get a foot in the door" of the Paris opera house by selling his libretto to the French composer Pierre-Louis Dietsch. Based on the idea (not on Wagner's text), Dietsch wrote a work of his own, *Le vaisseau fantôme* (= the ghost ship) in 1842: however, this work has been lost to the modern repertoire.

Not only did Wagner need to stay one step ahead of his French rivals, he was at first even forced to establish himself there as a composer. He received cancellations from the opera houses of Munich and Leipzig, where he had offered his score of the *Flying Dutchman* (completed on September 13, 1841), as well as from Berlin. However, in Dresden, rehearsals were finally underway for his *Rienzi*, and on

October 20, 1842 it was given a wildly enthusiastic reception. Subsequently, they decided to stage the *Flying Dutchman*. The premiere, which took place on January 2, 1843 was a flop. Ironically, *The Flying Dutchman* was to have its first breakthrough in Riga, where the premiere was held on May 22, 1843.

Wagner later revised the work several times (especially in 1860, in order to make it more appealing to the Paris audience). He considered the opera to be among his ten most significant works, even though he never proceeded to perform it in Bayreuth. In fact, it did not receive its premiere there until 1901.

The music

The overture is an immediate giveaway: Wagner had clearly undergone his sea voyage in 1839 as highly dramatic: one senses the wild rolling of the waves, the deafening howl of the storm, the whipping rain, the icy cold. All this seems to have been captured in this evocative music, which in its forcefulness clearly surpasses Carl Maria von Weber's *Wolfsschluchtszene* (= wolf's glen scene). For the first time, Wagner uses leitmotifs (= leading motifs) that accompany and orientate the listener in the action. However, nowhere does one encounter the kind of popular touch that one would find in Weber's music. Only the sailors' choruses appear to contain something of the folk style. The relatively small tenor role of the helmsman already reveals Wagner's theatrical instinct. The songs the boy sings to keep himself awake recount his innocent, everyday life, his unambitious bourgeois dreams. Wagner has even exploited the sense of increasing fatigue in his music. Meanwhile, in the orchestra, one can hear the threatening approach of the Dutchman, long before he actually appears on stage. And the Norwegian captain – a sonorous bass of dignified appearance – sings of his own limited world, in which prosperity and family play a central role, in a conservative, every-day tone. However, daughter Senta is by no means satisfied with this small world. At first, her opposition is expressed indirectly: jumpy musical figures in the orchestra continually announce her objections to the artless spinning songs of the girls. But not until she glimpses the portrait on the wall is she overwhelmed by passion. At times, she almost subconsciously takes over the musical motifs of the Dutchman. Wagner presents the soprano voice in a passionate tone, and proceeds in a similar manner with the Dutchman, whose bass – mysterious and darker than that of Daland – booms up from abysmal depths of despair. When he encounters hope, he is capable of heated passion. Nevertheless, the mood of his music is different

to anything known as opera at the time, pointing ahead to the music drama, in which traditional structures such as the recitativo and aria no longer exist.

Mary, the girls' nurse, makes a vain attempt to calm things down, sounding like a typical governess; and Senta feels compelled to defend her passion in a fervent monologue, while the girls reply in an informal, conversational tone.

The arrival of the ships triggers a general party mood. To this end, Wagner came up with some magnificent choruses. And he made an especially effective use of an unusual musical moment: silence. For the calls and invitations of the crowd of Norwegian men and women to the Dutch ship are, indeed, answered by – silence. One could perhaps refer to these silent answers as evocative general pauses. Only later on does one see the Dutchman's crew. Eerily, rising from the belly of the ship, one hears the first notes of a male chorus that gives the impression of howling (precisely controlled by Wagner). The hearty celebrations come to a sudden stop, fear and terror dominating.

Meanwhile, both Senta and the Dutchman have declared each other their love. They do that "without moving, immersed in the sight of one another" (Wagner), "enveloped in the (musical) art of 'sounding silence', which is later, in Tristan, so hugely successful" (Dietmar Holland). An inner world opens up, and an intense music-drama scene unfolds, rather than just an operatic duet. Nevertheless, no real dialogue develops. Senta's oath of "fidelity unto death" in an ecstatic B major key is the response to a "suddenly eerie pianissimo in the woodwinds and horns, with tremolo strings" (Hans Mayer).

That leaves us with Erik, the 'cuckold'. The composer has provided the appearances of the only "normal" hero in this opera – a tenor, "not a sentimental whimperer" (Wagner) – to woo his beloved with all the trappings of seduction. Splendour and grace, pride and aloofness are closely linked. In fact, Senta has no choice other than to consent to this faithful soul. Yet Wagner translates the way in which she manages to break free, in which Erik is shattered, into fascinating music. In the end, only the churning orchestral sea can cleanse all the gaping wounds that mark the transition of great opera to music drama.

Devised, discovered

No, Wagner's art is not based on democracy, as is a Haydn symphony. Wagner demands absolute attention. The Gesamtkunstwerk targets all the senses. Not even the printed score by itself is sufficient to satisfy Wagner. In fact, not until his own exemplary staging of the work does he achieve that degree of exclusivity, which allows him to

enthral the audience. After all, who would not want to be enthralled, the patriarch thinks – for that is also how he experiences life. He is interested mainly in married women, whom he seeks to 'remove' from their on-going commitments. Perhaps that is why he so idealizes Senta for her perpetual loyalty, because he is aware of the power of the seducer.

No one can say that Richard Wagner must have come across the Flying Dutchman, as he manages to describe him so impressively. Nevertheless, he did meet him in the Skagerrak, and decide to send Senta to him as his salvation, just as he used the figure of a woman to purify Tannhäuser and Lohengrin, Parsifal and Siegfried, and all the other heroes of German legends and myths. Or was it the other way around? Did the Dutchman in the end help Wagner to liberate himself from the damnation of eternal oblivion?

Basically, it does not matter why Wagner chose the Flying Dutchman. He could just as easily have chosen Odysseus or Manfred, or Faust, Icarus, Prometheus, or a character from the Grimm brothers' fairy-tales. They are all united by the explorer's spirit, the courage to search out unknown shores, to tempt and challenge fate and God. They are united by the common envy of others due to their success. They are united by the common malice of others, quick to rejoice at their failure. No comparison is strong enough to break out of this vicious circle of both human and deplorable behavioural patterns, to achieve the 'reine Ich' (= subjective self).

Steffen Georgi

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

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