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## Richard Wagner

Wagner was born in May 1813 and died of a heart attack in February 1883. He dedicated his life to music and to Germany. He was married twice and had a series of love affairs. His first wife died in 1866, Cosima (daughter of Franz Liszt) and the director Hans Von Bülow's marriage was annulled, Cosima and Richard were married a month later. In his lifetime, Wagner wrote 13 Operas, about a dozen choir pieces, Wesendonck Lieder which was 5 poems by one of mistresses (Mathilde) that he set to music and Siegfried Idyll which he wrote for his wife Cosima as a Christmas/Birthday present.

Wagner was forced to move a lot because of political unpopularity and also to avoid creditors and debtor's prison. When Ludwig II was placed on the throne as King of Bavaria in 1864, he gave Wagner a villa in Munich where Cosima joined him. In addition to the villa, the King Ludwig II favored with an annual stipend.

Wagner restructured the way in opera is written. He developed what is called the leitmotif which is a motive associated with a certain character or type of event and recalls the memory of that particular event to the minds of the audience members. For example, in *Die Walküre*, a light, descending motif is played when sleep is incurred by anyone, which is peculiarly called the slumber motif. The seemingly seamless nature of Wagner's operas was another attribute that made them unique. He did away with arias and wrote the music and songs so that they run right into each other. Wagner dedicated his life to what is called gesamtkunstwerk (total art work). Everything in his operas down to the blocking of the actors was art.

Wagner's dream was to build his own festival house. He looked all over Germany looking for the perfect place to build and finally settled on the small town of Bayreuth. Wagner had made an agreement with King Ludwig II that *The Ring* would be performed in its entirety in Munich but broke the agreement so that it could be performed first in Bayreuth. Wagner traveled Germany conducting concerts to raise money and he also encouraged societies to form in order to support it's building. The foundation stone was laid in 1872 and *The Ring* was performed in April 1876. Financially it was a disaster and was never performed again in Wagner's lifetime. Since his death, Wagner's works have been performed annually at the Festspielhaus.