

Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883)

History views Wagner with ambivalence. Musically he was a great genius who changed the course of operatic art, invented the Leitmotiv and developed chromatic harmony to the threshold of atonality. Unfortunately however, he became a very controversial figure, his reputation marred by less than endearing ideas and personal traits. As a young man he lived in poverty and struggled to have his art noticed. As recognition came improved circumstances enabled him to realise his tremendous operatic ambitions, including the writing and staging of the Ring cycle (over 25 years) and the construction of a theatre of special design at Bayreuth.

Parsifal, the last of Wagner's music dramas, is a consecrational work of unique beauty. The Prelude exhibits some of the strong themes of the opera, and through these there is the creation of intense moods. The piece advances through passages of thematic development and roving harmonies, and on it all there is Wagner's stamp, the unfolding of an inevitable story in music.