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***Unendlich Melodie* and the Twilight of Opera by Numbers:
The Fundamental Revolution of Richard Wagner's Redefined Operatic
Orchestra**

Richard Wagner stands as a paragon of the Nineteenth-Century cultural visionary and intellectual artist, an iconoclastic genius and unapologetic firebrand who left few aspects of the Western approach to music and drama untouched. As theoretical works such as *Opera and Drama* make clear, one of the most explicitly self-conscious of Wagner's myriad contributions to these two fields concerned his ideas on the function of the orchestra in opera, specifically its place within the overarching *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total art work") ideal. Several revolutionary lines of thought converge in the revamped definition of orchestral responsibility associated with *Gesamtkunstwerk*, including the holistic sense at the heart of his mature works, the development and treatment of the preeminent leitmotif, and the exploration of new tonal and harmonic realms, to name a few. While all of these have figured prominently in the history of opera and classical music in general since Wagner's time, it was above all his abandonment of the popular "Number opera" form, "consisting of individual sections or 'numbers' which can readily be detached from the whole" – in favor of a perpetual stream of melodic material – often referred to in Wagner's

writings as endless melody – that most concretely allowed for the convincing implementation of such astounding conceptual innovations (“Number opera”). In defying the standard practice of pitting flashy, virtuosic or purely emotive self-contained songs against what was to a certain extent declamatory filler, Wagner breathed new life into the operatic orchestra, granting it an expressive independence through which the rest of the aforementioned ideas could achieve their own place in the history of Western music.

An aesthetic response to the stop-start nature of the popular Italian and French operatic styles, the continuous, almost uninterrupted stream of music found in the majority of Wagner’s works beginning with *Der fliegende Holländer* was both the concrete foundation for the overwhelming transcendental artistic experience Wagner strove to create and the conceptual equivalent of the “unified existence” ideal of his paramount philosophical tenets. On a practical level, Wagner’s through-composed orchestral score provided a broader template for the presentation of his text and dramatic action, allowing a reduced conscious distinction between storytelling and emoting on the part of his characters, while the sheer fluidity of the music alone swept the listener up into his heightened dramatic world. It is this precise process through which Wagner sought to convey his artistic message. Moreover, the holistic quality produced first and foremost by his orchestral current was the most tangible expression of Wagner’s (somewhat slippery) philosophical stance. In accordance with his interpretation of Schopenhauer, the composer’s “most important non-musical influence,” as well as other sources from which he drew in his theorizations, Wagner needed to show that a music-drama could and should be more than the sum of its parts, that a true manifestation of *Gesamtkunstwerk* would be as sound in concept alone as in its actual dramatic effect (Magee 32). The most effective way to accomplish

this was to do away with the parts themselves as much as possible, creating a unified, symphony-like whole that began with the prelude and ended only with the final notes at act's end.

Beyond these primarily aesthetic imperatives, the through-composed format paved the way for two of Wagner's most important orchestral innovations, key players in his previously mentioned method of artistic communication and arguably at the core of his legacy: leitmotifs and tonal expansion. Wagner realized that the stilted world of premeditated showpiece-recitative exchange could provide him with no broader framework in which the leitmotifs for which he is so well known might expand and take new forms; successful motivic development requires *space*, a concept that populist operatic composers such as Rossini were apt to neglect in their "string of lyrical gems... strung upon a thread of recitative," as Algernon Baughman so scathingly put it (78). Similarly, the flowing model of endless melody allowed the sonic the orchestra with a heretofore-unimagined expressive capacity. A study of scores and compositional techniques in groundbreaking pieces such as *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* indicates the paramount importance of unbroken musical linearism in the successful deployment of motivic and chromatic orchestral elements.

That Wagner's more mature operas (those whose style and content demand the singular prefix of "Wagnerian" to separate them from previously established archetypes) sought an aesthetic sense of the holistic and indivisible in their integrated use of what Baughman calls "now nearly a rhythmic melody, and then, in more dramatic scenes, of a more declamatory order" (79) is virtually undeniable. However, the young and commercially ambitious composer's first three works – *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*, and *Rienzi* – each indicated a highly conscious appropriation of the popular German Romantic, Italian, and French styles respectively. As such,

their structure rested faithfully on “conventional forms of aria, recitative, romanza, cavatina [and] various ensembles” as well as the strategic deployment of bombastic showstoppers adored and demanded by Parisian opera-going society, whose cumulative approval or disapproval of an opera was the undeniable gauge for the material “success” (all considerations of artistic merit aside) of a work or its composer (Parks 145-146). However, it was in *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843), written after *Rienzi*’s blatant conventionality had brought him a degree of recognition, that Wagner “took a long step from [master of the French grand opera style] Meyerbeer and started to write opera with continuous music, less interrupted by arias and Italian flights into coloratura and ‘whatnots’” (Peyser 30).

Der fliegende Holländer was especially important because, along with the later *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, it anticipated Wagner’s eventual theoretical presentation of his “new art form... created by a single artist, who would write a poetic drama that should find full expression when it was set to a continuous vocal-symphonic texture” in *Opera and Drama* (1851) (“Music-drama”). Unlike Wagner’s previous works and the vast majority of those in the repertory of the period, it was divided dramatically and musically not by dead stops between self-contained numbers, but by its three acts alone. While still formally split up into the recognizable “Recit/Aria/Ballad” pattern (Wagner score), Wagner has now decided, as Edward Dent puts it (76):

... to drop the old system of isolated song with opportunities for applause at the end, and create a continuous style of music which allowed no thought of applause, not even a moment of respite until the end of each act. This forced audiences, as Wagner was consciously determined to achieve, into a new attitude towards opera. It was no longer possible to drop in and go away just as one pleased, hear a

particular singer and not bother about the rest; an opera had to be taken seriously and the audience had to give themselves up to it, abandoning all independence of personality like a patient submitting to an anesthetic.

In terms of the vocal and dramatic presentation of his text, Wagner's orchestral development allowed the precise emotions he hoped to evince in character's dialogue and actions to shine through. *Opera und Drama*, for instance, proclaimed his new kind of declamation, *Verse-melodie*, in which:

... the musical setting of a line was responsive to all the nuances of the verse. Since clear projection of the text was the primary purpose, there would no longer be any place for duets, trios, and choral ensembles. The old German alliterative verse form of *Stabreim* would be restored, and a system of presentiments and reminiscences (i.e. leitmotifs, though the term was not used by Wagner) would enable key ideas to resonate through the score like 'emotional signposts'" (Parks 149).

As Bryan Magee points out, although Wagner did his best to consciously adhere to this new conceptualization in the works written directly around the same time as *Opera and Drama* (specifically *Das Rheingold*), he eventually recognized that "when words and music are performed together the experience the listeners are having is, overwhelmingly predominately, a musical one" (230). The convincing marriage of words to music, therefore, relies first and foremost upon the presentation of the latter; the drama conveyed in Wagner's words essentially

rides the massive, swelling undercurrent of his orchestra's fluid sonic landscape that "builds cumulatively across great spans and arcs ... in long symphonic episodes" (Ibid). Matt Baileyshea's interpretation of the orchestral score in the *Ring* cycle as a "tissue of sound," emerging from the interplay of the many disparate yet interrelated roles it plays in that work (actual dramatic presence on-stage, emotional barometer, metaphysical "weapon" of the characters' intentions, etc.) supports this argument (8); the orchestral flow Baileyshea describes is what gives Wagner's new *dramatic* flow artistic resonance. Interrupting this flow by dividing his pieces into distinct units, therefore, would be the most surefire way to erode the poignancy of what is transpiring on stage. Since the crucial endless melody approach makes no distinction between storytelling and emoting, any concrete evidence of such a distinction, e.g. the typically self-conscious recitative-aria exchange, undermines the drama that, in Wagner's opinion, the music exists to serve (Tanner 12-13).

These ideas play into the overarching theme of Wagner's unique method of artistic communication. In light of his conviction that we should become "*knowers* through *feeling*" (qtd. in Tanner 9) rather than through the "synthesizing intellect" of analysis, Wagner stressed that in dramatic art, nothing should be left for our minds to piece together or appreciate consciously. Instead, we should grasp the inherent meaning of work purely by virtue of its "highest arousal of sympathy" and the "conclusive feeling" we experience when it is brought to rest (Ibid). Anything that drew the operagoer toward self-conscious reflection in the midst of his or her experience – whether this reflection regarded the significance of a piece, the specific musical elements at play, or simply the awareness of one's current situation as an audience member – detracted from the intended "transcendental" process of communicating meaning. The dead stop of the music and subsequent applause at the end of each little self-contained number in traditional French and

Italian opera were therefore anathema to what Wagner saw as his most sublime and fundamental way of connecting with the audience (Magee 92). To best remedy the situation, he had to whittle down the actual sonic gaps between the individual sections of his dramas as much as possible. While the unavoidable physical demands of scene change and certain given orchestral needs (tuning being perhaps the most obvious example, not to mention sheer mental or physical exhaustion) necessitate complete breaks between acts, these are the only points at which Wagner allows himself to interrupt the perpetually moving string of music drama hurtling toward inevitable climax. Just as the laws of causality dictate that one event logically follow another, so do Wagner's scenes within each act flow together, propelled forward on the most elemental level. Indeed, Wagner famously sneered at the "effects without causes" of Meyerbeer's works, easily an indictment of all operatic undertakings whose spectacular numbers seem to spring forth without precedent in the broader musical context, and for no apparent reason apart from their commercial viability (Tanner 36).

Beyond serving as the pragmatic basis for his entire creative approach, Wagner's perpetual sonic stream model concretely embodied his ideal philosophical construct of musical unification. In his article "On the Subjective-Musical Basis of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwelt*," Raymond Knapp asserts that "on one level, Wagner's [musical fabric approach] furthers a positive representational aim... it evokes the category of the sublime, which any representation of a deep sense of the world must necessarily do" (147). Even as his metaphysical convictions shifted and re-formed under the metamorphic influence of new ideas and situations, Wagner held fast to the idea that only by presenting the orchestra's music as an indivisible monolith could his attempts at *Gesamtkunstwerk* hope to achieve full aesthetic integrity, trumping the fractured (and

thus dishonest) nature of inferior forms. Magee demonstrates the pervasiveness of this idea when he states that “the young Wagner believed that the primary function of art was to show people the true inner nature of the lives they lived as members of humanity” – arguably the role of philosophy as well – and that he “wrote dismissively of humans so conceived as ‘units’” (83). Taken together, these two aspects meant that an honest artistic representation of humanity would be one that was holistic in construction; on a musical level, this holistic construction started once again with a continuous orchestral underpinning.

Wagner’s well-documented belief that the orchestra should play a comprehensive role similar to that which he believed was provided in ancient Greek drama by the chorus, “commenting perpetually on the action, heightening significant moments, encouraging and rejoicing, [etc.] (Magee 91), illuminates the ways in which a piece’s form or structural properties alone, if in keeping with the “total” part of “total art work,” can elevate it to a metaphysical level that content alone, no matter how compelling, cannot. In addition to emphasizing that the previously mentioned “malleable organic tissue” model was at the heart of Wagner’s *musical* idiom, the scope of the Greek chorus idea showed that even the manifestation of purely philosophical abstractions can affect a work’s gravity. As Dent succinctly puts it, “surrender was complete, not only to Wagner’s work of art” – its content, presentation, and the immediate experience thereof – “but to every principle of Wagner’s outlook on the relation of art to life” (80). The unified orchestral fabric, then, was the “representational” part of Wagner’s art as well as the facilitator of its practical communicative objective, as he believed the Greek chorus was in its own medium.

Although it marked a significant divergence from many of his previous beliefs about human existence, Wagner’s discovery and integration of Schopenhauer into his works only

bolstered the importance of conceiving of the orchestra's part in music-drama as a unified metaphysical entity. In Schopenhauer's claim that "everything that exists, whether rational or not, participates in the ultimate oneness of being" (Magee 164), Wagner found the philosophical counterpart to the concern he raised in *Opera und Drama* (written three years before even discovering the philosopher's *The World as Will and Representation*) that the standard emphatic distinction between "declaimed Recitative... [and] be-sung Aria" (Wagner 81) indicated an inherent gaping flaw in opera's supposed representation of existence. Since an example of *Gesamtkunstwerk* should be considered and appreciated (even if not on a conscious level) for all its dimensions, including the very manner in which it is conceived, such a piece simply *could not* articulate accurate truths about mankind if it were the product of conscious division. Strict adherence to Schopenhauer's conception of existence was the most assured way of achieving these elusive truths, which originated in the "oneness of being" that constituted the "foundation [of]... the nature of existence as such" (Magee 172). The first role of every *individual* component in a total art work was consequently to contribute as much as possible to the impression that there *were* no individual parts, conveying Schopenhauer's unified realm from which the rest of his ideas flowed. In the case of the orchestra's role, this prerequisite was a continuous musical fabric woven into the greater artistic synthesis.

From these two angles of interpreting Wagner's orchestral aesthetic, we can infer that he saw no difference between *how* he reached the audience – through the cumulative, overwhelming force of intoxication patent in Dent's "anesthesia" metaphor – and the abstract philosophical form of his art (*what* exactly it was that reached them) that would be just as powerful in its concept alone without any audience to experience it. Beginning with *Der fliegende Holländer*, (the work in which his "unique magic" of expression first took shape), Wagner saw that in order

to achieve these inextricably connected objectives, he had to follow “his inner drives and instincts in the creation of his work even when he himself was not really clear about what it meant or where it was going” – the single sharpest contrast with his explicitly premeditated amateur works (Magee 21/258). To abandon oneself to that unconscious creative impulse that best served the drama as a whole was first to abandon the school of thought that demanded numbers rather than through-composed symphonic pieces. In both practice and theory, Wagnerian holism began with the orchestra.

In addition to examining how the elimination of the aria-recitative format provided Wagner with the framework for new aesthetic demands both practical and philosophical, it is possible to establish that this process was also necessary for the motivic developments and radical tonal innovations that influenced virtually every composer of note after him, including his contemporaries and immediate successors in opera. Before he could offer us the complex, interwoven composite motives of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* or the rich string of dissonances that define *Tristan und Isolde*, he needed to reinvent the orchestral score in each act as something more akin to a responsive, stimulating ribbon of commentary than the plucky or sappy accompaniment of disjointed numbers.

There is no question that the motif and leitmotif (the latter typically being more concise or particular in reference) have come to represent Wagner’s musical personality. Although he never calls them by these names in his own writings, they constitute the core of his mature compositions in their endless capacity for evolution and reinvention; indeed, the entire orchestral score of *Parsifal* can be reduced to the “minimum of leitmotivic material” found at the very outset of the entire work (Holloway 23), while *Tristan* sees the composer abandoning “himself to

the sheer intoxication of ‘developing’ the mood symbolized by a particular motive for pages at a time, the stage situation meanwhile remaining stabilized” (Magee 210). From humble origins in *Tannhäuser* to the persistent, undeviating blare of the “Spear” in *Das Rheingold* to the infinitely complex composite forms cascading forth in the Prelude to Act III of *Götterdämmerung*, the motif has long been considered the defining structural element of Wagner’s orchestral scores. The interplay and development of these themes is “the warp and weft of whatever it is that is being dramatically expressed” – they are the cognitive musical footholds in our whirlwind tour of Wagner’s fantastic through-composed universe (Magee 261). However, the efficacy of this quintessentially Wagnerian technique once again rests on the broader orchestral context of endless melody; without first removing the artificial dramatic barriers of independent songs, such complete and utter reliance upon specific, recurring music themes would seem at best disjointed, at worst, destructive to the entire psychological momentum of the work.

Number opera, by definition, is based on a series of detachable songs designed to captivate the audience on a very basic level; it is hard to ignore the breathtaking staccato fireworks of the Queen of the Night’s aria in *Die Zauberflöte* – even if they consist of nothing more than the single syllable “ah” (Mozart 44). As they are designed to appeal to the same set of expectations we have for a “good song,” these pieces place an obvious premium on concision. Just like virtually anything in today’s pop music catalogue, an aria or chorus had to be short enough for its most lyrical moment or rollicking refrain to define it, independent of the rest of the dramatic or music context; when someone hummed a tune in the streets, it had to *first* be from the “Anvil Chorus,” *then* from *Il Trovatore*. The concise individual pieces are what musically distinguish one emotional setting from the next within the whole work, and even what distinguishes the entire opera itself from others of similar vein. Wagner’s motives – what most

readily distinguishes the music of *his* distinct operas – conversely require extensive unbroken temporal space to seem organic and cohesive in their development throughout the entire opera. Like the emotions they churn up, either explicitly representative of the drama on stage or stemming from deeper musico-psychological levels, these motives flare up, creep in, and smolder across vast arcs, once again conveying to the idea of the work as an instantaneously conceived whole. In his article, Knapp underscores (144):

...The fluid nature of Wagner's orchestral fabric, in which a collection of related motives (whatever they might "mean") recycle in what is often a partial or submerged state, and through which he avoids conventional markers of musical or operatic form while building up to clarifying moments in which these half-buried, half-suggested motives emerge reconstituted, with renewed force and clarity

The implications of this excerpt are clear: if the exposition, variation, and synthesis of motives and their appearance in various musical and dramatic contexts are what give Wagner's most important works their structure – supplanting the parallel but more artificial role of songs in Number opera – then they *must* have enough uninterrupted sonic space to shape the work itself, emotionally as well as plot-wise. The restless motivic transfiguration of Wagner's protracted passages, moreover, indicates that these units also contributed in large part to the sense of a continuous whole, embodying the natural, unconscious flow of composition fundamental to a true "Wagnerian" opera. Clearly, then, the consistent interruptions of the music (and consequently the action) typical of Number opera subdivision would necessarily derail the organic process of motivic development.

This idea is vital to the previously discussed method of communicating and conveying drama to the audience subconsciously, even in works characterized by a more concise,

straightforward presentation of clearly defined motives. Imagine, for example, the vast psychological chaos that would have ensued had Wagner attempted in his composition of *Die Walküre* to employ even the most basic of his motives for cognitive effect, and simultaneously, to organize the opera into a series of distinct numbers. Hearing the unresolved loop of the suspended “Fate” motive in Act III, Scene 3, would first recall the formal musical packaging it came in – perhaps an Aria by Brünnhilde. The subsequent impulse of reflection, then, would be a musical one rather than a dramatic one: the audience would remember the quality of the aria – what the loveliest passage was, how it measured up to other arias, etcetera – rather than instantaneously recalling everything about the relevant previous *dramatic* situation – the heroine’s slow, ominous steps, the fear and wonder in Siegmund’s eyes, and so on. The motive’s new form would not immediately imply that something has changed or been suspended dramatically so much as it would remind us of a prior musical episode, specifically designed for us to pay attention to and appreciate as an individual song, and all our thoughts about that episode. As Holloway says of the minimum melodic substance used throughout *Parsifal*, motivic occurrences “project local meaning into large-scale aural architecture, for each further reference to the opening recalls and includes those before, requiring the listener to remember and compare, to make intelligible and therefore to interpret... ever-wider-ramifying implications” (23). Wagner’s use of transforming, blending, ever-changing motifs to circumvent the synthesizing intellect and contribute to the overall experience as a fusion of the arts was entirely dependent upon the fluidity of the orchestral texture.

Other than facilitating the use of motives as the primary orchestral building block, endless melody also paved the way for Wagner’s break from traditional concepts of Western tonal harmony, most powerfully expressed in concept of *Tristan*’s entire score and in specific

sections of *Parsifal*. Just as the exclusive use of motives was not an innovation for innovation's sake, but rather an innovation necessary to how Wagner hoped to communicate the overarching message of his works, so too did he employ radical chromatic tension and dissonance as a means of expressing complex emotional/psychological ideas that the more traditional constraints of tonality simply could not. While he is often credited as providing the impetus (or at least setting the stage) for the so-called "destruction of tonality" in the 20th century, his harmonic departures are not based in the absolute lack of harmonic language that typifies the twelve-tone works of Schoenberg or Webern. Although the "Tristan chord" certainly leapt beyond any previous conceptions of musical progression, it produced such a powerful effect *precisely because it* pushed against what was already there – a realization made most explicit in the fact that the work eventually *does* resolve in a way that makes sense within the familiar context of functional harmony. According to Magee, the entire idea of this opera composed of one dissonant chord dissolving into another was to create the "purely musical equivalent of unassuaged longing, craving, yearning, that is our life" (208). Thus, the eventual point of using strange, chromatically conceived textures was to underline the movement from suspension to "final resolution" upon which traditional harmony is in fact based. *Tristan* is unique only in that, rather than containing the multiple tensions and resolutions that would be expected in number-based opera to distinguish between its individual sections, the whole work up until Isolde's transfiguration in death is one massive suspended state.

Passages in *Parsifal* noted for their tonal ambiguity similarly support the assertion that "Wagner's chromaticism was not designed to achieve merely momentary effects of harmonic colour" but to serve the overall impact of the music-drama ("Harmony"). The music framing Gurnemanz's declaration of the "innocent fool" prophesy in Act I, for example, is "built upon

the [Dresden] Amen, first in torturous chromatic distortions *that clarify into complete diatonic purity* for the return of the opening melody” – again pointing to the use of chromatic expression as a means to an more psychologically complex end (Holloway 32). Additionally, what Holloway calls the “central sonorous image” of the work, its defining passage, is (144):

a slab of orchestral texture, of processional movement, of *harmonic suspension*... that if not checked will pound on forever round the circle of fifths. [This sonorous image] then gathers up... altered contexts and further associations until it achieves a satiety of expressive utterance... powerful enough to carry the complex and contradictory meaning of the work.

Holloway specifies that this passage, the motivating and sustaining force behind the entire piece, is “not even thematic, let alone leitmotivic” – it derives its power by virtue of its turbulent, singular enharmonic language alone, developing toward the opera’s final resolution by adopting different tonal contexts (Holloway mentions at least three) instead of taking new concrete “forms” as do the motives in *The Ring*.

The most convincing examples of chromatic elements successfully contributing to the artistic import of Wagner’s acclaimed works, then, illuminate the need for large stretches of unbroken sonic space; like his motives, Wagner’s chromatic passages function by coaxing forth cognitive associations that make the interrelation of different scenes meaningful. Both in instances where the aim is to create tension in anticipation of a final resolution, and in those where enharmonic structures serve more esoteric functions, the ultimate goal of “an undreamt-of

expansion of consciousness” (Tanner 46) depends upon the orchestra’s freedom to explore without artificial boundaries of Number opera.

It is obviously misguided and oversimplifying to think that Wagner envisioned his revolutionary ideas as stemming from any sort of clear-cut logical linear sequence, that one “epiphany” about how to most effectively convey his unique artistic impulses logically proceeded or followed another and was consequently more or less important in the grand scheme of things. Even when he so strongly spells out certain hierarchical beliefs, such as music’s subservience to words and action in opera, he is liable to contradict himself later in both written word and his works themselves. A more plausible hypothesis might be that, in keeping with the vision of holism upon which he was so ardently fixed, Wagner thought of his new orchestral techniques – structural and compositional alike – as a single indivisible answer to what opera was and what he thought it should be. Moreover, the hazy chronology in the development of these aspects and the varying degrees to which they appear in Wagner’s successive operas suggest that they did not all arise fully formed to challenge convention en masse.

In spite of these given ambiguities concerning the composer’s conscious intentions and beliefs, however, by analyzing *how* Wagner succeeded in redefining the orchestra, in both aesthetic/ representational and musically concrete terms, we can conclude that the number-based style of operatic composition was the fundamental inhibitor to the orchestral innovations for which he is remembered – Knapp remarks that “Wagner’s technique [of unbroken music] represents a kind of short-circuit, designed to bypass utterly not only the conventional forms of musical discourse, but also the societal structures those forms betoken and model” (148). Additionally, Dent’s says of Verdi’s *Otello* that “What seemed ‘Wagnerian’ [about Verdi’s

work] to the critics of 1887 was that *Otello* is a much more continuous work than any of Verdi's previous operas; Verdi was not so meticulous as Wagner about avoid definite stops in the course of a scene, but generally speaking the music runs on without any obvious breaks for applause" (83). That Verdi, the personification of populist 19th-century opera, was esteemed as "catching on" to Wagnerianism in this departure from his typical form due first and foremost to his work's musical continuity contributes one brief piece of anecdotal evidence to the argument that even in the years immediately surrounding Wagner's death, everything that seemed to work about his music-dramas was founded upon this single idea.

As Baileyshea points out at the beginning of his article, "defining the precise role of the orchestra in Wagner's mature opera is, quite simply, impossible" (3). In all operas – especially those of a composer as notoriously obsessed with the smallest detail of his craft as Wagner – the orchestra is bound, like the Greek chorus, to play a number of disparate yet interrelated and inextricable roles. Nevertheless, by redefining the orchestra's relationship to the drama in terms of continuous motion, Wagner elevates it into something that is indeed more than the sum of these new responsibilities and the methods used to meet them, a "mythical element, a medium through which the characters move, speak, sing and act" (Ibid 8). Replacing the formulaic divisions of Number opera with this perpetual motion was the key that unlocked the philosophical and practical aspects at the core of Wagner's unified orchestral objective that have had such an indelible impact on the history of Western music since his time.

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