

Musical Treasure Chest #55

Happy Mother's Day to all mothers! I know it is an "invented" celebration, and its current American incarnation only dates back slightly over one hundred years, but all cultures from the earliest days have honored mothers in many different ceremonies and traditions. Musicians of Ma'alwyck fêtes mothers today with the release of a new video short. I am SO excited and proud of this short. I hope you will take the few minutes to watch it. It will leave you smiling and perhaps singing and dancing too!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WH2HOL_2tDw

I debated with myself over what music to share with you for this treasure chest. I thought about perhaps an opera selection—but only terrible mother depictions were coming to mind, think *Queen of the Night!* Then I thought about ballet, but drew a blank—the stepmother from *Cinderella* definitely doesn't make the grade, and in the other popular ballets there seems to be an absence of mothers (perhaps this maternal void in ballet libretti could be a dissertation topic?!). There are probably some song cycles that would admirably do, maybe Schumann's *Frauen Leben und Lieben* (and this song collection is surely one of the most beautiful in the vocal repertory), but I think I have thought of the piece that I really want to share with you, a piece so lovely, tender and luminescent. And though written as a Christmas present, it truly celebrates motherhood and love. Can you guess? I am sharing with you today **Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll***.

For the 25th of December 1870 Cosima Wagner wrote in her diary: "When I woke up I heard a sound, it grew ever louder, I could no longer imagine myself in a dream, music was sounding, and what music! After it had died away, R. came in to me with the five children and put into my hands the score of his "symphonic birthday greeting." I was in tears, but so, too, was the whole household; R. had set up his orchestra on the stairs and thus consecrated our Tribschen forever! The Tribschen Idyll—so the work is called . . ." Cosima was the new (and second) wife of Richard Wagner. She had married the previous August, after she had already given birth to three of his children (Isolde, Eva and Siegfried). Cosima had two

children by her first husband, conductor Hans von Bülow (who despite the infidelity remained a tremendous fan and promoter of Wagner's music). The *Idyll* celebrated not only Wagner's ardent love for Cosima, but his joy in his children and domestic life. The *Idyll* was played three times on that Christmas morning of 1870, and remained a favorite work of Wagner. It is unusually intimate for this often bombastic and orchestrally extravagant composer. The one movement piece is full of gentle flowing melodies that would later reappear in his Ring Cycle. One of the themes is drawn from the German lullaby 'Sleep, little child, sleep.' The instrumentation (just 13 players) needed to be no larger than what would fit onto the stairs in their Tribschen house. The conductor Hans Richter played trumpet in that Christmas Day performance.

I want you to hear the original chamber version (Wagner later re-orchestrated it for a much larger group and sold the rights to the piece). Here a version with young musicians from the Curtis Institute in an intimate setting that rather duplicates the first performance. Enjoy and Happy Mother's Day!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebWi32_kn8g