

## *Parsifal* and Canada: A Documentary Study

The Canadian Opera Company is preparing to stage [Parsifal](#) in Toronto for the first time in 115 years; seven performances are planned for the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts from September 25 to October 18, 2020. Restrictions on public gatherings imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have placed the production in jeopardy. Wagnerians have so far suffered the cancellation of the COC's [Flying Dutchman](#), Chicago Lyric Opera's [Ring cycle](#) and the entire [Bayreuth Festival](#) for 2020. It will be a hard blow if the COC *Parsifal* follows in the footsteps of a projected performance of *Parsifal* in Montreal over 100 years ago. Quinlan Opera Company from England, which mounted a series of 20 operas in Montreal in the spring of 1914 (including a complete *Ring cycle*), announced plans to return in the fall of 1914 for another feast of opera, including *Parsifal*. But World War One intervened, the *Parsifal* production was cancelled, and the Quinlan company went out of business. Let us hope that history does not repeat itself.<sup>1</sup>

While we await news of whether the COC production will be mounted, it is an opportune time to reflect on *Parsifal* and its various resonances in Canadian music history. This article will consider three aspects of *Parsifal* and Canada: 1) a performance history, including both excerpts and complete presentations; 2) remarks on some Canadian singers who have sung *Parsifal* roles; and 3) Canadian scholarship on *Parsifal*.

**NB:** The indication [DS] refers the reader to sources that are reproduced in the documentation portfolio that accompanies this article.

### **A Performance History of *Parsifal* in Canada**

*Parsifal* was given for the first time on July 26, 1882 at the Festival Theatre in Bayreuth. The next day, a brief syndicated report appeared in many Canadian newspapers. [DS 1] A detailed review of *Parsifal* appeared in the "Music and Drama" column of the Toronto *Globe* on July 28. [DS 2] The unnamed critic states that the work is modest in scope compared to the *Ring cycle*, and notes "It is remarkable that there is no love in the plot." The writer compares *Parsifal* to *Lohengrin* (both works drawing upon the legend of the Holy Grail), to the detriment of *Parsifal*: "The story of the later work is distinctly inferior to the other in simplicity, beauty, and human interest; of the last-named quality we should rather say that it has none at all." A plot summary and description of the staging and costumes are given; the writer notes the enigmatic qualities of Kundry, and observes that the Flower Maidens wore flesh-coloured tricots that made them look as naked as the women in Hans Makart's [The Entry of Charles V into Antwerp](#) (1878). A much longer and more sympathetic review, reprinted from the New York *Nation*, appeared in the *Globe* three weeks later; it noted that the Prelude to Act 1 of *Parsifal* is "of wonderful beauty, destined soon to become a favourite in concert halls." [DS 3] And so it was to prove.

Four months after the premiere of *Parsifal*, Toronto audiences had the chance to hear that Prelude in live performance by the visiting (Leopold) Damrosch Symphony Society from New York in the 1,500-seat Pavilion of the [Horticultural Gardens](#) (renamed Allan Gardens in 1901).<sup>2</sup> The unnamed reviewer in the *Globe* was entirely sympathetic towards the *Parsifal* excerpt, and

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<sup>1</sup> Dorith Cooper, *Opera in Montreal and Toronto: A Study of Performance Traditions and Repertoire 1783–1980* (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1983) notes another disturbing parallel with the present day. The San Carlo Opera Company had been giving annual tours that included stops in Quebec City, Montreal, and Toronto. "During the Fall of 1918, however, a flu epidemic in Montreal and Toronto forced the company to cancel part of its Montreal visit as well as its entire stay in Toronto" (p. 512).

<sup>2</sup> The Pavilion burned down in 1902; by then Massey Hall (opened in 1894) was Toronto's leading music venue.

evidently familiar with the work: “The Prelude to Wagner’s new opera *Parsifal* opened the second part, and it is safe to say that if any of Wagner’s detractors listened, they must have been astonished at the simplicity of treatment and yet grandeur of this little *Vorspiel*. The four principal motifs of the opera are here enunciated, almost without elaboration, and yet by the hand of the great master of orchestral treatment are brought out with thrilling effect and impress the hearer with the deep religious feeling that pervades the great work.” [DS 4]

Visiting orchestras from the USA often presented excerpts from *Parsifal* in Canada in subsequent years, at times quite substantial ones, under conductors such as Leopold Damrosch and his son Walter Damrosch, Emil Paur, Anton Seidl (who had assisted Wagner in preparing the first performances of the *Ring* cycle at Bayreuth), and Theodore Thomas. The orchestras appeared either alone or in concert with local choral societies. Visiting bands under leaders such as Giuseppe Creatore, John Duss, Frederick Neil Innes, and John Philip Sousa, often performing outdoors in city parks during the warmer months, also introduced audiences in cities large and small across Canada to excerpts from *Parsifal* arranged for concert band. [DS 5]

Anton Seidl brought the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra to Toronto in April 1893 for two concerts billed as a “Wagner Festival” that included, among other excerpts, the Prelude to Act I of *Parsifal* and the Flower Maidens scene from Act II. [DS 6] For a series of five orchestral concerts in Montreal in June 1884, Theodore Thomas brought with him three singers who had premiered leading roles in *Parsifal* at Bayreuth just two years earlier: Hermann Winkelmann (Parsifal), Amalie Materna (Kundry), and Emil Scaria (Gurnemanz). [DS 7] Excerpts from five Wagner operas were programmed on that occasion, though nothing from *Parsifal*. The Canadian composer Guillaume Couture reviewed the Thomas concerts in Montreal’s *La Patrie* newspaper, and wrote a series of three articles about Wagner to familiarize local readers with the composer.<sup>3</sup> According to Marie-Therese Lefebvre, in the summer of 1897 Couture also made the pilgrimage to Bayreuth and attended a performance of *Parsifal*.<sup>4</sup> Other Canadians who heard *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in the 1890s were the conductor F.H. Torrington,<sup>5</sup> and the composer [W.O. Forsyth](#), who visited in 1892, one year after [Mark Twain](#).

At the age of 20 the Canadian musician Ernest MacMillan travelled to Bayreuth and he too heard *Parsifal* there; the performance he attended was on August 1, 1914, the very day that Germany declared war on Russia. It was to be the last performance at Bayreuth for ten years. Unfortunately for MacMillan, he was soon interned in Germany as an enemy alien and spent the remainder of the war in the Ruhleben Prison Camp near Berlin. The experience did not sour him on the music of Wagner, however. MacMillan often conducted Wagner excerpts during his 25-year-long long tenure as conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (1931–1956); e.g. he gave all-Wagner concerts in his first two seasons, 1931 and 1932, including the *Parsifal* Prelude in 1932. He programmed the Prelude and Good Friday Music from *Parsifal* on numerous other occasions, both before and after World War Two (in 1935, 1937, 1947, 1949, 1951, 1952, 1953, and 1956). A later visitor to Bayreuth was [Lawrence Mason](#), the music and drama critic of the Toronto *Globe*, who wrote a long essay for the newspaper about hearing five Wagner operas there, including *Parsifal* conducted by Toscanini, in 1931. [DS 8]

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<sup>3</sup> The articles appeared on p. 2 of the newspaper on 23, 24, and 28 June 1884 respectively; they are discussed briefly below in the section on Canadian scholarship on *Parsifal*; the portfolio of documentation sources contains all of Couture’s reviews and articles on this occasion.

<sup>4</sup> Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre, “La musique de Wagner au Québec au tournant du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes* 14 (1994): 60–76; see p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Morey, “The Music of Wagner in Toronto before 1914,” *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 18/2 (1998), 25–37; see p. 31, n. 19.

The Toronto musician Frank Welsman, who had studied music in Leipzig, paved the way for MacMillan by introducing Wagner excerpts with his Toronto Symphony Orchestra before World War I, including all of Act 1, scene 2 of *Parsifal*, which was given in Massey Hall on January 19, 1910 with the National Chorus (trained by Albert Ham), the US baritone Frederick Weld as Amfortas, and the local singer Rhynd Jamison as Titurel. [DS 9] Luigi von Kunits, who was the conductor of the Toronto Symphony when it started up again after a five-year hiatus due to the war, led the orchestra in excerpts from *Parsifal* on the evening of April 17, 1930 (the day before Good Friday). The performance was broadcast on the “Transcontinental Hour” show of the [CNR network](#) and was heard from coast to coast. [DS 10] The theme of the hour-long broadcast was “Music of the Holy Grail”; it included three excerpts from *Lohengrin* and six from *Parsifal*. Two Canadian vocal soloists were featured: the soprano [Jeanne Hesson](#) (Kundry) and the baritone [Dalton Baker](#) (presumably Amfortas; though listed as a tenor in the radio listings, he was actually a baritone).<sup>6</sup> The next day, April 18, 1930, Canadian listeners could tune in to hear Cesare Sodero conduct *Parsifal* with the NBC National Grand Opera Company on radio stations in Canada associated with the NBC network. Jim McPherson notes that the NBC *Parsifal* was “so condensed for the occasion that Kundry was apparently excised altogether.”<sup>7</sup> Whether by design or by chance, the two broadcasts did not overlap to a great extent; the Kunits excerpts omitted the character of Parsifal, and the Sodero ones omitted Kundry.

The Montreal Symphony has also played extensive *Parsifal* excerpts many times over the years, even during the Second World War. Extensive excerpts from *Parsifal* under the Montreal-born conductor Wilfrid Pelletier were heard in the closing event of the Montreal Music Festival on June 3, 1938; the concert included the start and finish of Act 1 and all of Act 3. The religious element of the work can only have been enhanced by the fact that the performance took place in the St. Laurent College Chapel. [DS 11] Despite Pelletier’s long service at the Metropolitan Opera, he never conducted *Parsifal* there, although he did conduct the Norwegian bass Ivar Andresen as Gurnemanz in a concert performance of the Good Friday Music at the Met on January 25, 1931. The MSO programmed the Prelude and Good Friday Music on May 15, 1942 under the Belgian conductor Désiré Defauw. [DS 12] Alexander Kipnis sang the role of Gurnemanz in the Good Friday Music; his portrayal of the role has been captured in the earliest complete recording of *Parsifal* ever issued, a live performance in 1936 from the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires. The MSO under the late Franz-Paul Decker gave a concert performance of Act 2 of *Parsifal* on February 4, 1991 with Siegfried Jerusalem as Parsifal and Jessye Norman as Kundry; the role was new to her, as she made her stage debut as Kundry at the Metropolitan Opera the next month, on March 14, 1991. [DS 13] The Montreal critics reported that it was a night to remember, indeed “the stuff of local history” according to Arthur Kaptainis. [DS 14]

The Vancouver Symphony Society performed the Prelude from *Parsifal* for the first time on February 3, 1935 under Allard de Ridder. [DS 15] It was the first time the orchestral version was heard in the city, but it had been heard in performances by visiting bands as early as 1901. [DS 16] De Ridder programmed the work again on November 7, 1935. In Winnipeg, local performers mounted excerpts from *Parsifal* in 1925 (the Grail Scene, conducted by Arthur

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<sup>6</sup> Between 1930 and 1936, Jeanne Hesson-Pengelly sang Eurydice (Gluck) at the Met, Sieglinde in Chicago, Donna Anna in Cincinnati, Carmen in Montreal, and Gilda and Tosca in Toronto, but she retired from the opera stage in 1937 to raise her family. See “Singer Finds Luck in Cycle of Three,” *Ottawa Citizen* (25 April 1936): 15.

<sup>7</sup> Jim McPherson, “Before the Met: The Pioneer Days of Radio Opera. Part 2, The NBC National Grand Opera Company,” *Opera Quarterly* 16/2 (2000): 204–223; here pp. 212 and 216. For more information on Sodero, see Jim McPherson, “Before the Met: The Pioneer Days of Radio Opera. Part 3, Cesare Sodero, The Music Man,” *Opera Quarterly* 16/3 (2000): 407–426.

Egerton), 1931 (Good Friday Music), and 1934 (a choral excerpt). [DS 17] During World War 2, Wagner performances were scarce outside of Montreal, but they resumed after the war. The popular orchestral excerpts from *Parsifal* even began to be played by youth orchestras and student [concert bands](#). [DS 18]

### ***Parsifal* Fever**

*Parsifal* resonated deeply with North American musical, religious, and popular culture at the turn of the twentieth century. Opera enjoyed a popularity at the time that is hard to appreciate now; there was a celebrity culture around the leading opera singers of the day that was stoked by the growth of the recording industry (Enrico Caruso was the first artist to sell a million records) and rivalled that of the movie stars of later generations. More specifically, the cult of Wagnerism was centred at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and, as Joseph Horowitz has pointed out, in the person of Anton Seidl, but its echoes reverberated far and wide.<sup>8</sup>

Wagner remained a polarizing figure for many decades after his death, but one that attracted much attention and interest. The fact that *Parsifal* was based on the legend of the Holy Grail enhanced its popularity in North America, where audiences were intimately familiar with the story from the Arthurian legends, and more particularly from the widespread popularity of Tennyson's narrative poem "The Holy Grail" from his cycle *Idylls of the King*. The Christian element in *Parsifal* also struck a deep chord with North Americans, and the interest in and curiosity about this aspect of the work was only augmented by the strident opposition that the opera elicited from some religious authorities.

North American fascination with *Parsifal* rose to a peak thanks to the bitter legal battle in 1903 between the Metropolitan Opera on the one hand, and Cosima and Siegfried Wagner on the other. Richard Wagner had intended *Parsifal* to be given exclusively in the Festival Theatre in Bayreuth, and after his death in 1883, staged performances were covered by European copyright protection for a period of thirty years, until December 31, 1913. (Half a dozen [performances](#) took place on January 1, 1914, immediately after the copyright expired, at various places in Europe.) While the *Parsifal* ban was effective in most of Europe, copyright protection did not extend to the United States. Heinrich Conried, the manager of the Metropolitan Opera, was determined to produce *Parsifal* in 1903, his first season at the Met. Canadian newspapers followed with much interest the legal proceedings Cosima and Siegfried Wagner launched against Conried in their hapless attempt to prevent the New York *Parsifal* performance from taking place. The Wagners lost the legal case in a ruling handed down on November 24, 1893. Cosima was furious and threatened to forbid anyone who took part in the New York production from ever singing at Bayreuth again.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless *Parsifal* was duly given at the Met on [December 24, 1903](#), with eleven repeat performances following thereafter.<sup>10</sup>

The combination of all these factors led to a serious case of *Parsifal* fever in the early twentieth century; North Americans seemingly could not get enough of the work in any form whatsoever. After the Met performance, *Parsifal* adaptations proliferated with extraordinary

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> See "Victim of Frau Wagner's *Parsifal* Curse," Vancouver *Daily Province*, 20 August 1906, p. 6 for an account of how Marion Reed was shunned at Bayreuth after singing Kundry in the Metropolitan Opera production of *Parsifal*.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief discussion of early *Parsifal* performances in the USA, see Michael Saffle, "Parsifal Performances in America, 1886–1903: Changing Taste and the Popular Press," Chapter 12 in *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U.S.A.*, ed. John L. DeGaetani and Josef P. Sirefman (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994): 161–168.

speed. A *Kyrie* featuring music from *Parsifal* was soon heard in Sunday church services, and the Prelude quickly became a popular number in organ recitals. Torontonians could hear excerpts from *Parsifal* on a daily basis at the Mason and Risch showrooms on King Street West in 1904, and purchase piano rolls for home use if they owned a pianola (player piano). [DS 19]

Numerous spoken play versions of *Parsifal* criss-crossed North America. A certain Bruce Gordon Kingsley offered a one-man show version of *Parsifal*, in which he related the story, played excerpts on the piano, and unveiled nearly 100 paintings of the drama; the *Victoria Daily Times* improbably claimed that his performance “is conceded by both public and critics to equal the grand opera rendition itself.” [DS 20] At the other end of the scale, the 50-person Martin & Emery company toured the west in 1906 with its *Parsifal* play, making stops in Winnipeg in September, and Vancouver and New Westminster in October. [DS 21] Newspaper ads for the Martin & Emery play gave the mistaken impression that it was Wagner’s opera that was on offer, rather than a play based upon it. Despite the complete absence of Wagner’s music, the play was Wagnerian in length; a review in the *Winnipeg Tribune* noted that “The duration of the play was four hours and the intermissions were brief.” [DS 22] A review in the *Vancouver Daily Province* stated the obvious: “There is a vast difference between Wagner’s opera and the festival play presented at the Opera House on Saturday night. If ever music was needed to help along a drama it was in *Parsifal*.” [DS 23] Nevertheless the Martin & Emery play version of *Parsifal* went on tour again in 1908 for 40 weeks, visiting Vancouver, Winnipeg and London, Ontario, among many other stops. Vancouver had another chance to see *Parsifal* without Wagner’s music when the silent film version of the opera (“bigger and better than the stage version”) played at the [Maple Leaf Theatre](#) in July 1913; this was the 50-minute-long film made in 1912 by the Italian director [Mario Caserini](#). [DS 24] (The US director Edwin S. Porter had released a 25-minute-long silent film version of *Parsifal* in 1904.)

Less than a month after the Met performance of *Parsifal* on Christmas Eve 1903, notices began to circulate about plans for Walter Damrosch to bring a touring production of *Parsifal* to Toronto. Newspaper ads gave the impression that the entire work was to be heard [DS 25], and indeed Damrosch had given a complete concert performance of *Parsifal* in New York in March 1886. But on this occasion, it was a program of excerpts in concert form, given in Massey Hall on April 5, 1904. Damrosch conducted and gave explanatory comments to link scenes together and also illustrated the principal leitmotifs on the piano. The cast included the Quebec baritone Francis Archambault as Amfortas. [DS 26] The production toured various cities; the program for the Chicago performances can be seen [here](#). On May 5, 1904, one month after the Damrosch concert, the Toronto-based violinist Heinrich Klingensfeld gave a lecture about Wagner at the Toronto Conservatory of Music, with musical excerpts illustrating all of Wagner’s operas from *Rienzi* to *Parsifal* played on the Aeolian Orchestrelle, a self-playing reed organ. [DS 27]

### ***Parsifal* on stage in Toronto and Montreal**

In retrospect, these events can be seen as leading up to the first staged performances of *Parsifal* in Canada. These were given in 1905 by the U.S. impresario Henry W. Savage’s touring opera company.<sup>11</sup> Savage had introduced Toronto to Verdi’s *Otello* (November 9, 1904; an “admirable

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<sup>11</sup> See Daniela Smolov Levy, “Chapter 1: Henry Savage’s English Grand Opera Company (1895–1912),” in her [Democratizing Opera in America, 1895 to the Present](#) (PhD thesis, Stanford University, 2014): 31–137 for a study of the Savage company. [“English” in the company’s name indicates that performances were sung in English, not that the company was from England.] The chapter ends with a case study of the *Parsifal* tour (107–133) but has little to say about the Canadian appearances. After Toronto and Montreal, the company made only one further stop, in

presentation”) and Puccini’s *La Bohème* (November 11, 1904; “the story lacking in dramatic interest ... the general feeling was one of disappointment”), and later in 1905 he brought to the city for the first time *Die Walküre* (November 23, 1905; “the repellant nature of the symbolic story ... counted for naught against the potent attraction of the music”). [DS 28–30]

Thanks to Savage, audiences in Toronto and Montreal saw staged performances of *Parsifal* before London, Paris, Milan, and most other major operatic centres. Savage’s English-language version of *Parsifal* toured the United States and Canada from October 1904 to May 1905. The production started with a two-week run in Boston (the initial home base of Savage’s operations), and then moved on to New York. Savage planned to cash in on the Parsifal craze that Conried had ignited. (Conried also took the Metropolitan Opera production of *Parsifal* on the road, beginning in March 1905, but did not tour as widely as Savage’s production and did not come to Canada.) A report in the Montreal *Gazette* stated that the New York engagement had to be cut short because the show was “not popular,” and predicted that Savage “will lose a fortune in the venture.” [DS 31] Reports of the production’s demise were premature; it subsequently went on to visit 45 cities, large and small, over the next six months. The only Canadian stops on the tour were Toronto, which saw four performances from April 24 (Easter Monday) to April 26, 1905, and Montreal, where four performances were given April 27–29, 1905. Matinee and evening performances were given on April 26 in Toronto and on April 29 in Montreal.<sup>12</sup>

As Daniela Levy points out, Savage emphasized the elite status and cultural prestige of *Parsifal*, but also made it accessible to general audiences by performing it in English and selling tickets at affordable prices.<sup>13</sup> The venue in Toronto was the [Princess Theatre](#) on King Street West and the Montreal performances were given in [His Majesty’s Theatre](#) on Guy Street; each theatre seated ca. 1,800 people. Two weeks before the Toronto performances, Albert Ham, the founding conductor of the National Chorus, gave a lecture on *Parsifal* at the Toronto Conservatory of Music, illustrated by a dozen musical illustrations on the Aeolian Orchestrelle. [DS 32] The US composer and educator Rubin Goldmark, a pupil of Dvořák and later the teacher of both Copland and Gershwin, was an advance man for the Savage company; he gave a free lecture on *Parsifal* at the Princess Theatre in Toronto on April 18 and at His Majesty’s Theatre in Montreal on April 20. A report on the Montreal lecture noted that 2,000 people (mostly women) turned out to hear him speak. Goldmark also lectured on Wagner in Ottawa in 1904 and 1905, and on *Parsifal* in Winnipeg on February 22, 1905 as part of a series of five talks he gave for the local Women’s Musical Club, one on each opera in the *Ring* cycle and one on *Parsifal*. He gave the same series of lectures in Vancouver in 1906, with the *Parsifal* lecture falling on May 15. [DS 33]

The demand for tickets for the Savage production of *Parsifal* in Toronto and Montreal was extraordinary. In Toronto, people lined up at midnight on April 20, nine hours before the box office opened; according to the *Globe*, sales established “the record in receipts for any opera performance given in this city,” and resulted in close to \$10,000 in income for the company. [DS 34] In Montreal tickets also went on sale on April 20, and broke the theatre’s record for opening day sales; it was later reported that the Montreal sales equalled those in Toronto. [DS 35] An

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Portland, Maine, before disbanding. Jim McPherson, “The Savage Innocents Part 2: On the Road with *Parsifal*, *Butterfly*, the *Widow*, and the *Girl*,” *Opera Quarterly* 19/1 (2003): 28–63 also deals with the Savage company’s *Parsifal* tour at length, as well as its subsequent tours of *Madame Butterfly* (1906–08), *The Merry Widow* (1907–08), and *The Girl of the Golden West* (1911–12), all performed in English.

<sup>12</sup> The evening performance in Toronto on April 26 was at the same time as a recital at Massey Hall by Paderewski; his Montreal recital was on April 24 and so did not conflict with the *Parsifal* performances there.

<sup>13</sup> Levy, p. 32–33.

extensive plot summary of *Parsifal* was given in the *Toronto Globe* on April 22 [DS 36] and an analysis of the music of *Parsifal* appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* on April 12. [DS 37]

A short article on the day of the first performance in Toronto noted that the 200-member touring production (including a 60-member orchestra) had been deemed “greatly superior to the Metropolitan Opera House production of Mr. Conried” by the US newspapers. [DS 38] While it may seem preposterous to suggest that a touring production of *Parsifal* with a 60-piece orchestra could hold a candle to the Metropolitan Opera’s sumptuous staging of the work, in fact critics in many cities found great merit in the Savage company’s staging. Albert Jeannotte in his review for the Montreal weekly illustrated magazine *Album universel* notes that the *mise-en-scène* was carefully modelled “selon la tradition de Bayreuth”; some idea of the look of the production can be gleaned from an illustration of the final scene that accompanied his review [DS 39; available online [here](#)]. A picture of Klingsor’s Castle from Act 2 of the Savage production circulated as a postcard [DS 40], and the Flower Maidens scene was reproduced in the *Victrola Book of the Opera* (1917), which can be seen [here](#).<sup>14</sup> An interesting article in the *Montreal Gazette* offers a behind the scenes tour of the production, noting how closely the scenery and lighting effects are modelled on those of the original Bayreuth production, and pointing out that the company’s 20 stage hands are assisted by an extra crew of 75 hired at each city on the tour. [DS 41]

At this point in the Savage tour, the principal roles were double cast except for Kundry, which was triple cast. Details are given in an ad that appeared in the *Montreal Gazette*. [DS 42] Savage preferred to hire US musicians for his company, although for *Parsifal* he was forced to employ European artists in many of the key solo roles. The German conductor Moritz Grimm and the English conductor [Walter Rothwell](#) shared the conducting duties. Jim McPherson in his [article](#) on the Savage company’s *Parsifal* tour includes remarks on the leading cast members for the entire tour (pp. 36–39; see also the list on p. 55).

The review of *Parsifal* was front-page news in the *Toronto Globe*. The critic (unnamed, but presumably [E.R. Parkhurst](#)) noted that the large and diverse audience was likely attracted in equal measure by the media attention accorded the work, its representation of the Holy Grail legend, and the symbolic presentation of “certain beliefs of Christianity.” [DS 43] The Christian element of the work occasioned divided responses elsewhere, but not in Toronto, where it was positively viewed on the whole. There was no mention of [anti-Semitism or racial purity](#) in the work, which have been much discussed in the past 25 years; the concerns in 1905 were that Kundry washing Parsifal’s feet with her hair and the enactment of the Last Supper on stage might be sacrilegious. “Wagner has not hesitated to reproduce on the stage the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, nor to obviously parody the washing of the feet of the Saviour by the Magdalene. While these features of *Parsifal* may give offence to some, it is certain that Wagner had no intention of shocking the susceptibilities of devout Christians,” the *Globe* reassured its readers. A second notice about *Parsifal* in the *Globe* the next day went even further: “in some cases it has awakened the dormant religious sense of many whose imagination has been stirred by its sacred symbolism.” [DS 44] Lefebvre notes that in Montreal there was no negative reaction to the *Parsifal* performances from the French clergy, for two reasons: the work was given in English for a predominantly English-speaking audience; and the French press was too busy covering the consecration of Zotique Racicot as auxiliary bishop of Montreal on April 28 to take note of the *Parsifal* production.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The postcard states that Klingsor’s Castle is from Act 3, and the Grail Temple in *Album universel* is captioned Act IV, which leads one to surmise that the first act was split into two acts, however none of the reviews mentions this.

<sup>15</sup> Lefebvre, p. 73, n.35

Canadian audiences outdid Bayreuth in terms of the reverential reception accorded to *Parsifal*. In Bayreuth, the tradition had arisen to withhold applause after Act 1 of *Parsifal*. In Toronto and Montreal, however, the entire work was greeted with an awed silence. In Toronto, “Owing to the sacred nature of the theme of *Parsifal*, neither the conductor nor the singers received any applause.” [DS 43] In Montreal, “there were some who dared inflict their hand-claps, though this seeming profanation was hastily hushed under a stern storm of angry hisses. In an atmosphere impregnated with the spirit of Bayreuth, impressive silence greeted the most dramatic situations ... the two final acts of the drama were listened to in awe, as would some great church ceremony.” [DS 45] The Christian element of the story was clearly an important aspect, perhaps the defining element, of *Parsifal* reception in early twentieth-century Canada.

The *Globe* review noted that “There is little in the work that gives the solo singers an opportunity of making a popular appeal by a display of vocal art” but nevertheless singled out the *Parsifal* of Francis Maclennan for praise: “the Canadian tenor ... displayed a fine voice and fervor of expression whenever the music permitted.” [DS 43] Maclennan’s wife, the soprano Florence Easton, was born in England but raised in Toronto and as we will see, later became a famous Kundry. [DS 46] The couple had gotten married in London on May 14, 1904; on the afternoon of that same day, Maclennan signed his contract with Savage.<sup>16</sup> The alternate cast received only a short summary review in the *Globe* on April 26: “the principals, Miss Florence Wickham taking Kundry; Mr. Pennarini, *Parsifal*; Mr. Bischoff, *Amfortas*, and Mr. Cranston, *Gurnemanz* ... sang with much fervor and expressive power.” [DS 47] The Montreal *Gazette* reviewer especially praised Hanna Mara’s Kundry and Alois Pennarini’s *Parsifal*, noting that their scene in Act 2 “was probably the most powerful one of the whole evening.” [DS 45] The *Gazette* review also noted that Eva Maude Smith, one of the Flower Maidens, was a native of Montreal; an earlier article noted that 1,200 women had auditioned for the 24 Flower Maiden roles. [DS 48] Jeannotte, writing of the Montreal performance in *Album universel*, felt that the soloists did not live up to the standards of the rest of the production (“les solistes n’étaient peut-être pas tous digne de l’ensemble”); nevertheless he remarked that Franz Egenieff was “un *Amfortas* remarquable” and Putnam Griswold (as *Gurnemanz*) “ne mérite aussi que des éloges,” but he saved his strongest praise for the impresario Savage. [DS 39]

There has not been another staged performance of *Parsifal* in Toronto since the Savage company production of 1905. Montreal, however, had another opportunity to see the work in 1954—sung in German for the first time in Canada—when it was given a run of five staged performances in the [Show Mart Hall](#) (an exhibition space converted for the occasion into a 2,800 seat theatre) on April 10, 11, 13, 15, and Good Friday, April 16. [DS 49] The Montreal *Gazette* critic Thomas Archer toured the performance space a few days before the first show, and noted that the production (directed by Désiré Defrère of the Metropolitan Opera) was modelled on the New Bayreuth aesthetic of Wolfgang and Wieland Wagner: a bare stage, with scenic effects created mostly by lighting. [DS 50] Collaborating in preparations for the production, in addition to Defrère, were the conductor [Charles Houdret](#) (a Belgian musician who had moved to Montreal two years earlier), the choirmaster [George Little](#), a chorus and orchestra of local musicians, the local baritone [Napoléon Bisson](#) as *Klingsor*, and four star singers from the Metropolitan Opera: Ramon Vinay (*Parsifal*), Rose Bampton (brought in at the last minute to replace Doris Doree as Kundry), Martial Singher (*Amfortas*), and Dezső Ernster (*Gurnemanz*). Reviewing the opening performance, Archer stressed the religious side of the experience: “it was a religious act ... an act of faith ... a Passion play in a way.” [DS 51] Perhaps he was hoping to allay the suspicions of

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<sup>16</sup> McPherson, p. 37.



the still-powerful religious authorities in the city, but Archer's remarks strongly echoed those of the Canadian critics writing about the Savage company production 50 years earlier.

Montrealers had yet another chance to hear *Parsifal* live, though in a concert performance rather than staged, three years ago. The Canadian conductor [Yannick Nézet-Séguin](#) led his first *Parsifal* for the closing concert of the 40<sup>th</sup> Lanaudière Festival on August 6, 2017, at the Fernand Lindsay Amphitheatre, 50 km north of Montreal. The international team of soloists included the German tenor Christian Elsner (*Parsifal*), the Japanese mezzo-soprano Mihoko Fujimura (*Kundry*), the Canadian baritone Brett Polegato (*Amfortas*, his debut in the role), the British bass Peter Rose (*Gurnemanz*), and the Israeli baritone Boaz Daniel (*Klingsor*), accompanied by the Orchestre Métropolitain, with the orchestra's chorus as well. The performance was [warmly reviewed](#) and won the 2017 Opus Award from the Conseil québécois de la musique for concert of the year in Montreal.

Six months after his Lanaudière Festival *Parsifal*, Nézet-Séguin took over the conducting duties for the Metropolitan Opera staging of the work by the Canadian team of François Girard (director) and Michael Levine (set designer), to a rave review in the [New York Times](#). This is the gloomy, blood soaked, postapocalyptic staging that the COC plans to mount in the fall. It is a co-production with Opéra National de Lyon (which was the first out of the gate, having staged the production in March 2012), and the Met (which launched it in February 2013, initially under the conductor Daniele Gatti). If worst comes to worst, we can take some small consolation in the fact that we will still be able to enjoy the Girard/Levine *Parsifal* while practicing physical distancing in the safety of our homes, via the [Met Opera on Demand](#) online streaming service.

### Some Canadian *Parsifal* Singers<sup>17</sup>

Two Canadians who sang in early *Parsifal* performances have been noted above. The Quebec bass-baritone Francis Archambault (1879–1914) sang *Amfortas* on tour with Walter Damrosch in 1904. Francis MacLennan (1873–1935), who sang the title role for the Savage company tour 1904–05 was born in Michigan, but had moved to Collingwood with his parents; reviews in Canadian newspapers of his performances throughout his career consistently claimed him as a Canadian. MacLennan's wife, [Florence Easton](#) (1884–1955), enjoyed a stellar international career in opera, eventually eclipsing that of her husband (whom she divorced in 1928). She made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1917 and went on to sing 35 roles for the company up to 1936. Her role debut as *Kundry* at the Met (in an English language performance) took place on April 2, 1920 (*Good Friday*) and was warmly received. She went on to sing the role six times at the Met in the 1920s, in both English and German. Writing of her performance as *Kundry* in 1922, the critic W.J. Henderson stated “Mme. Easton's interpretation commands the highest praise that can be given because of its remarkably fine dramatic and musical qualities.” [DS 52] Easton sang all of the major Wagnerian roles and made many [recordings](#), including as *Brünnhilde* in a much prized final scene from [Siegfried](#) with Lauritz Melchior, but she did not record as *Kundry*.

Easton appeared on stage together with the Canadian tenor [Edward Johnson](#) (1878–1959) in the premiere of Deems Taylor's opera [The King's Henchman](#) at the Met in 1927, but the two never sang together in a *Parsifal* performance. Johnson had made his debut at the La Scala opera house in Milan in the title role of the first Italian staging of *Parsifal* in January 1914, right after the Bayreuth copyright expired. [DS 53] According to [Napier Moore](#), Johnson met Benito

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<sup>17</sup> For a brief general history of Canadian opera singers known for their Wagnerian roles, see Richard Turp, “A Grand Wagnerian Tradition,” *Opera Canada* 47/4 (2006): 24–26.

Mussolini on opening night, and went on to sing the role at La Scala 25 times over the next three months. [DS 54] Johnson sang the role in Italian, and soon after the run was over he went into the recording studio and became the first Canadian singer to record excerpts from *Parsifal*. For the Columbia label, he recorded (in Italian) “[Il Santo Gral](#)” (“Das heil’ge Blut erglüht”) from Act 2 (rereleased on CD in 1993 on [Analekta AN 27802](#)) and “[Soltanto un’arma val](#)” (“Nur eine Waffe taugt”) from the end of Act 3. After the La Scala performances, Johnson seems not to have sung the role on stage again. During his tenure as General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera from 1935 to 1950, however, he presided over dozens of performances of *Parsifal*, most often with the legendary tenor Lauritz Melchior in the title role.

The soprano Odette de Foras (ca. 1895–1976) was born in France, raised in Calgary, and did her advanced studies in London. In July 1926 she sang Kundry in a student performance of *Parsifal* at the Royal College of Music (yes, a *student* performance!); the *Musical Times* [critic](#) said she had “an uncommon voice and general ability” and “may well become a great singer.” [DS 55] After graduating from the Royal College in 1926, she appeared often at Covent Garden in a variety of Wagnerian (and other) roles, including three performances of Kundry (in English) in October 1931. In 1936, at the height of her career, de Foras retired from the stage. She moved back to Alberta, where she “occupied herself with the family ranch” according to [Gilles Potvin](#).

Irene Jessner (1901–1994) is best known to Canadians as an inspiring vocal teacher in Toronto; her pupils included Teresa Stratas and Mark DuBois. She was born in Vienna and enjoyed a flourishing opera career in central Europe during the 1930s before being invited to the Metropolitan Opera by Edward Johnson in 1936. She sang a variety of Wagner roles at the Met, including Elsa to Melchior’s Lohengrin in 1937, and other major roles such as Desdemona in *Otello* and the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*. In *Parsifal* at the Met, however, she sang only as one of the Flower Maidens (from 1939 to 1946); the same is true, incidentally, of her pupil Stratas (in 1960 and 1961), and of the Canadian contralto Jeanne Gordon (in 1920 and 1921).

A new generation of Canadian-born singers came to the fore as Wagner singers after World War II, several of them excelling at leading roles in *Parsifal*. The bass-baritone [George London](#) (1920–1985) was born in Montreal and became the first Canadian-born singer to appear at Bayreuth, singing Amfortas there at the first post-war festival in 1951, on the recommendation of the conductor Hans Knappertsbusch. The production was designed by Wieland Wagner and inaugurated the New Bayreuth aesthetic.<sup>18</sup> London went on to sing the role of Amfortas many times at Bayreuth and the Met. Three commercial LP sets of London’s live Bayreuth Festival performances were released during his lifetime, recorded in 1951, 1953, and 1962. The first and last were conducted by Knappertsbusch, the first in mono, the last in stereo. The 1953 *Parsifal* was conducted by Clemens Krauss. In addition to the commercial recordings, some off-the-air radio broadcasts have been released by specialty labels or online. The discography on the *Parsifal* website [monsalvat.no](#) currently lists eight complete performances of *Parsifal* in which London sings Amfortas, seven of them from Bayreuth, and one from a 1954 Metropolitan Opera production. The 1962 Bayreuth album stands out from this list; many reviewers regard it as the greatest *Parsifal* ever recorded; indeed, Alan Blyth called it “[one of the greatest sets of all time](#).” Perhaps the greatest compliment paid to London, however, came from Wieland Wagner, who

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<sup>18</sup> See Karl H. Wörner, “*Parsifal* at Bayreuth,” *Canadian Music Journal* 4.4 (1960): 19–24.

told London's wife Nora after listening to a rehearsal of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth, "Grandfather [i.e. Richard Wagner] could not have visualized anyone greater than George London."<sup>19</sup>

London's final outing as Amfortas at the Metropolitan Opera was on March 10, 1966; that same performance saw the first appearance of another Canadian in a role that he would own at the Met for the next 20 years. The baritone [Morley Meredith](#) (1922–2000) from Winnipeg made his role debut as Klingsor that day, and went on to sing the part 22 times between 1966 and 1985. Meredith specialized in portraying villains; Rangoni (*Boris Godunov*), Pizzaro (*Fidelio*), Telramund (*Lohengrin*), Scarpia (*Tosca*), and the four villains in *Tales of Hoffmann* were some of the other roles that he sang at the Met, in addition to his many Klingsors. "I love to sing nasty people," Meredith told *Opera News*, "they make the good ones look even better." In reference to *Parsifal*, Meredith added "Klingsor is a revealing man, the key to the whole opera, and the singer can make an impression in about sixteen power-packed minutes."<sup>20</sup> Meredith made a number of recordings, but not of *Parsifal*; however several of his Met performances were broadcast and can be heard on specialty labels, and one from 1982 is available on the [Met on Demand](#) online streaming service ([audio only](#)). Meredith sang Klingsor at the Met for the last time on April 17, 1985; on that occasion, he shared the stage with another Canadian singer whose career was closely associated with *Parsifal*: Jon Vickers (1926–2015).

Vickers was a committed Christian who famously refused to sing the role of Tannhäuser because he regarded the opera as blasphemous.<sup>21</sup> He had similar reservations about *Parsifal*, but in the end managed to reconcile singing the title role with his religious convictions, and in fact sang it 42 times, according to the list of his performances in the Jeannie Williams biography.<sup>22</sup> He returned to the role consistently throughout his career, from his role debut at Covent Garden in 1959 at the age of 32, until his very last public performance, in a concert version of Act 2 in Kitchener in 1988 at the age of 61.<sup>23</sup> Michael Linton relates what made a Vickers performance special: "With most singers, and even many great ones, we leave the opera house pleased with a pleasant diversion. But with Vickers, we left thinking that perhaps theater really could change someone's life—perhaps even ours."<sup>24</sup> Vickers brought a searing intensity to the role of Parsifal that has never been equalled. Early in his career he sang it at [Covent Garden](#) and Bayreuth (in Knappertsbusch's last performances of the work there), and later in Paris, the Met, Geneva, and [Chicago](#). There was also a single performance at the Vienna State Opera in 1967. Vickers did not record the work commercially, but at least four of his performances have been released as live recordings: Bayreuth ([1964](#)), Covent Garden ([1971](#)), Paris ([1976](#)), and the Met (1979, on [Met on](#)

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<sup>19</sup> The quotation is from Nora London's 1987 memoir, *Aria for George*, reprinted in "George and Nora London," *Wagner Moments: A Celebration of Favorite Wagner Experiences*, ed. J.K. Holoman (New York: Amadeus Press, 2007): 134–135.

<sup>20</sup> "Saints and Sinners [*Parsifal* cast biographies]," *Opera News* (20–27 April 1974): 19.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Linton offers a well-reasoned defence of Vickers's stance on *Tannhäuser* in "Sing Unto the Lord [a review of the Jeannie Williams biography of Vickers]," *First Things: A Journal of Religion and Public Life* 108 (December 2000): 49–54. Vickers was a serious-minded Protestant but not an evangelical Christian.

<sup>22</sup> Jeannie Williams, *Jon Vickers: A Hero's Life* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999): 311–340. There are errors in the list of performances, but it gives a fairly good estimate of the number of times Vickers sang Parsifal.

<sup>23</sup> Niki Goldschmidt stated that he coached Vickers in a performance of Act 3 of *Parsifal* in 1956 for a CBC broadcast, but I have not yet been able to find documentary evidence to support this. See Gwenlyn Setterfield, *Niki Goldschmidt: A Life in Canadian Music* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003): 69–70 and Williams, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Linton, p. 49.

[Demand](#)).<sup>25</sup> For a snapshot of what Vickers sounded like in this role at the height of his career, listen to “[Amfortas! Die Wunde!](#)” from his 1976 Paris performance.

Two other Canadian tenors have sung Parsifal internationally since Vickers retired from the role. As an opera student at the University of Toronto, Paul Frey (b. 1941) admired Vickers greatly. “Jon Vickers was my hero, and in the beginning I tried to copy him—not a good idea,” Frey told Joseph So. “You have to be yourself.”<sup>26</sup> Frey was a lyric heldentenor, and rocketed to international success as Lohengrin—a role that Vickers never sang—in the mid-1980s, singing it at Bayreuth 38 times between 1987 and 1993. He soon added Parsifal to his repertoire, singing it for the first time in Karlsruhe, and then also in Hamburg during the 1986–87 season. Earlier he had sung one of the Grail Knights in Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s film version of *Parsifal*, released in 1982—the centennial of the premiere of the work. (Frey does not appear on screen in the film, as Syberberg chose actors to portray most of the characters; the actors lip-synch to the pre-recorded soundtrack recording.) Frey also sang excerpts from *Parsifal* in concert, for example “Nur eine Waffe taugt” with the Toronto Symphony in January 1993 under Franz-Paul Decker as part of an all-Wagner program.

Ben Hepper (b. 1956) performed a wide range of repertoire during his stellar international career, but was particularly celebrated for his Wagnerian roles, especially Lohengrin, Tristan, and Walther von Stolzing. He was hailed by many as the greatest heldentenor since Vickers, who reportedly said “He’s got a better voice than I had. It’s true!”<sup>27</sup> Unlike Vickers, Heppner never appeared at Bayreuth; he turned down the offer to sing Lohengrin in 1999 and was never invited again. He came to Parsifal quite late in his career, and sang it just three times at the Met in 2006. “By the time I got to Parsifal,” he told Joseph So, “there were several handsome, young baritones moving up into heldentenor.”<sup>28</sup> When the Met next mounted *Parsifal* in the new Girard/Levine staging in 2013, Heppner was on the verge of retirement; Jonas Kaufmann assumed the title role. As Heppner never recorded *Parsifal*, and his Met appearances were not broadcast, the evidence of his interpretation is confined to a single superb rendition of “[Nur eine Waffe taugt](#)” that he made in 1998 for RCA Victor.

Two Canadian baritones took on the role of Amfortas recently. Gerald Finley (b. 1960), who enjoys a busy international career in an impressively wide variety of recital and operatic repertoire, sang [Amfortas](#) for the first time with the Royal Opera House, [Covent Garden](#) in 2013. It was Covent Garden’s sole Wagner offering for the bicentennial year, and was entrusted to the director Stephen Langridge. The production met with mixed reviews, but Finley in his role debut was highly praised (“a complete performance, powerfully done” opined the [New York Times](#)). It was released on DVD on [Opus Arte](#) in 2014. Finley reprised the role for the Vienna State Opera in March/April 2017. The controversial new [staging](#) in Vienna by the Latvian director Alvis Hermanis is set in a psychiatric hospital, and Amfortas’s wound is relocated from his side to a hole in his head.<sup>29</sup> Both the audience and the [critics](#) were divided on the production, but Finley gave a committed performance that was again greeted with [acclaim](#). Finley also sang Amfortas with Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic in Dieter Dorn’s staging at the Baden-Baden Easter Festival in March 2018, followed by two concert performances in [Berlin](#) in April 2018.

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<sup>25</sup> A few bootleg releases of other Vickers performances as Parsifal can be found online. A video of Vickers’s 1982 Geneva *Parsifal* can be viewed online [here](#), but the recording quality is exceptionally poor.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph So, “Grand Tradition: Paul Frey,” *Opera Canada* 44/1 (2003): 9.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, p. 310.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph So, “Ben Heppner: A Retrospective,” *La Scena Musicale* 20/1 (September 2014): 16–18; available [online](#).

<sup>29</sup> Wagner had relocated Amfortas’s wound from his testicles (its location in medieval sources) to this side; in Wagner’s telling, it is Klingsor who has injured his testicles.

As noted above, Brett Polegato (b. 1968) made his role debut as Amfortas in *Parsifal* in a concert performance at the Lanaudière Festival under Yannick Nézet-Seguin in August 2017.

The tenor [Lance Ryan](#) (b. 1971), who like Heppner is from British Columbia, followed in Paul Frey's footsteps at Karlsruhe, 20 years later, becoming a regular singer there in 2005 and taking on Wagner roles such as Siegmund, both Siegfrieds, and Lohengrin. He soon was in great demand internationally as Siegfried, singing the role across Germany and in Spain and Italy, as well as at Bayreuth. He has not yet sung Parsifal on stage, but he studied the role at Bayreuth, so we may have another Canadian Parsifal tenor to add to this list one day. And finally, the COC *Parsifal* performances in 2020 will feature the Toronto bass [Robert Pomakov](#) (b. 1981), who trained at the prestigious Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, in his role debut as Klingsor.

### **Canadian Scholarship on *Parsifal***

The earliest writings on *Parsifal* in Canada were reports by newspaper critics who commented on the Bayreuth premiere (these were likely syndicated reviews from the USA), on performances of excerpts from *Parsifal* that were given in Canada at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and on the Savage company production of 1905. Some of these writers were surprisingly knowledgeable about Wagner in general and *Parsifal* in particular, and as noted above, a number of Canadians made the pilgrimage to Bayreuth to see *Parsifal*. Despite the great enthusiasm of individual writers, however, [Wagnerism](#) as a phenomenon never took root in Canada the way that it did in Germany and subsequently in France, the USA, and other places.

In Montreal, the composer and educator Guillaume Couture (1851–1915) made strenuous efforts in the late nineteenth century, both as a conductor and as a writer, to acquaint Canadians with the Wagnerian canon. In connection with the series of five concerts, including many Wagner excerpts, that Theodore Thomas gave in Montreal in June 1884, Couture wrote three reviews as well as three articles titled “Recherches sur Richard Wagner” for the Montreal newspaper *La Patrie*. The articles consist mostly of quotations from writers in France (among them, Saint-Saëns) coming to the defence of Wagner against his critics. Interestingly Couture seems to have felt that he had to defend *Lohengrin* as much as *Parsifal* (or *Percival* as he calls it), despite the fact that the former work was established as a staple of the operatic repertoire by the 1880s and that Elsa was one of the signature roles of Couture's compatriot Emma Albani. Montreal, however, had not yet seen a staged performance of *Lohengrin*; a touring company gave the first performance in Montreal on January 7, 1888 with the Irish tenor Barton McGuckin in the title role. [DS 56] Couture raved about the Thomas concerts, calling the first one “le concert le plus extraordinaire dont Montréal ait été témoin.” No doubt Couture risked offending the sensibilities of at least some of his readers when he referred to the music of Wagner in his last review as a religion: “Bayreuth ... est son temple: Wagner en est le dieu.” That Couture says little about *Parsifal* is not surprising, given that he would not have had the opportunity to see the work until his 1897 trip to Bayreuth. Couture's articles and reviews are included on pages 31 to 38 of the portfolio of documentation sources that accompanies this article.

In addition to Couture, a number of other Canadian musicians were spreading the gospel about Wagner in the late nineteenth century. The Toronto pianist Waugh Lauder (1857–1931), was purportedly a pupil of Liszt and also claimed that he played for Wagner in Venice. He gave a lecture-recital on “[Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future](#)” in Toronto with excerpts from a number of Wagner's music dramas (though not *Parsifal*), and Liszt's *Dante* Symphony for two pianos, eight hands; the event was on February 2, 1883, just eleven days before Wagner's death.

Others who lectured on Wagner in Toronto at the turn of the twentieth century included A.S. Vogt, Anna Farini, and (as noted above) Heinrich Klingensfeld and Albert Ham.<sup>30</sup>

Couture's pupil Léo-Pol Morin (1892–1941) wrote four articles about Wagner for the Montreal newspaper *Le Canada*. In “Wagner à Tribschen” ([7 September 1937, p. 6](#)), Morin writes from Lucerne about a pilgrimage he made to Tribschen, the villa where Wagner stayed from 1866 to 1872; the villa had recently (in 1933) been made into a Wagner museum. “Richard Wagner” ([30 October 1939, p. 2](#)) is a short biography, offered simply because “on ne peut pas dire que sa musique soit parfaitement connue du grand public québécois.” In “Wagner, dramaturge et musicien” ([13 November 1939, p. 2](#)), Morin notes that while Wagner exercised a huge influence on many aspects of culture in the past, what remains of most interest in 1939 is the music. Nonetheless Morin notes a turning away from Wagner by the likes of Debussy and Stravinsky, and he quotes the French writer and poet Roger Allard, who said that he preferred Bellini to “la fausse messe et vêpres interminable de *Parsifal*.” While noting these critiques, and the close association of Wagner's music with the Third Reich, Morin nevertheless concludes by asserting that “*Tristan* restera le prototype musical de l'amour charnel inassouvi et *Parsifal* celui de l'amour divin.” In the last article, “Pour Wagner” ([2 January 1940, p. 2](#)), Morin rebuts the idea that Wagner should be boycotted because of Hitler's enthusiasm for the composer, stating that “L'état de guerre avec l'Allemagne n'a rien à voir avec un génie comme Wagner, qui appartient à l'humanité entière.” Morin died in 1941, so we will never know if his views about this might have changed had he lived to see the end of the war.

The association between Wagner and the Third Reich is one of the most pressing and hotly contested issues that scholars grappled with after World War II, and *Parsifal* is a crucial work in this debate. Notwithstanding the presence in *Parsifal* of the themes of Christianity and compassion [*Mitleid*], it was a work that Hitler prized greatly. The analogies between [Hitler](#) and [Parsifal](#)—a new leader from the outside coming to the rescue of an exhausted old order—were remarked upon at the time, within Bayreuth circles and in Germany at large. This identification was consolidated by the scholar Alfred Lorenz in his article “Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* and National Socialism,” published in 1933 [*Deutsches Wesen* (July 1933): 68], the same year that Hitler assumed power and that Lorenz's book on *Parsifal* appeared as the fourth installment of his magnum opus, *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner* (“The Secret of Form in Richard Wagner”) [Berlin: Max Hesse].

Lorenz's work on Wagner is the subject of a PhD thesis completed at the University of Western Ontario in 1994 by the Canadian musicologist Stephen McClatchie (b. 1965), who turned his thesis into the book [Analyzing Wagner's Operas: Alfred Lorenz and German Nationalist Ideology](#) (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998). McClatchie notes that Lorenz's first published article, “Parsifal als Übermensch” [*Die Musik* 1 (1902): pp. 1876–1882], already “elevates the Parsifal story into a type of German-nationalistic religion” (p. 19); Lorenz interprets Parsifal rather than Siegfried as the true Nietzschean superhuman. McClatchie adds (p. 20) that Lorenz saw in the rise of Adolf Hitler the advent of a modern-day Parsifal for Germany, and moreover that for Lorenz, “Wagner was not just a composer, but a thinker of all-encompassing greatness, a spiritual forefather of Nazism” (p. 22).

After completing his PhD thesis, McClatchie returned to *Parsifal* in an [article](#) published in 1997 that considers then-recent developments in applying narrative theory to music, using

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<sup>30</sup> On Vogt and Farini's lectures, see Morey, pp. 28–29.

Kundry's narrative in Act 2 of *Parsifal* ("Ich sah das Kind") as a test case.<sup>31</sup> McClatchie points out that Kundry's aria is based almost entirely on the leitmotif of Herzeleide (Parsifal's mother); Kundry 'steals' Herzeleide's motive—"she essentially *becomes* his mother, musically" (p. 4)—to enact (musically and dramatically) a sort of incestuous seduction of Parsifal (at the behest of Klingsor) for the purpose of destroying him. With this (overly) simple leitmotivic analysis as his starting point, McClatchie soon complicates the issue and introduces various alternative ways of 'reading' Kundry's narrative, referencing and interrogating the work of Carolyn Abbate and Julia Kristeva, among others.

Among the Wagner-related activities fostered by Canada's two Wagner societies, one in Toronto (founded in 1975) and the other in Vancouver (no longer active; it was dissolved in 2012), have been lectures and other scholarly activity. Alan David Aberbach (1932–2010) of the Vancouver society was an historian at Simon Fraser University and frequent commentator for CBC Radio opera broadcasts. He published four books on Wagner, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner* (1984, rev. 1988, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2003); *Richard Wagner: A Mystic in the Making* (1991); *Richard Wagner's Religious Ideas: A Spiritual Journey* (1996); and *Richard Wagner's Spiritual Pilgrimage* (1998). Aberbach wrote extensively on *Parsifal* in these books, but I have not been able to access them due to library closures.

The [Toronto Wagner Society](#) has fostered Wagner scholarship, and has enjoyed a close relationship with the University of Toronto Department of English. [William Blissett](#) (b. 1921), a U of T English professor from 1965 until his retirement in 1987, was a founder of the TWS and a frequent lecturer for it on subjects such as "Aubrey Beardsley and Other Wagnerite Artists," and "Nazi Use and Abuse of Wagner." He has published frequently on Wagner and Wagnerism, with articles on the relationship to Wagner of Gabriele D'Annunzio, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Carl Jung, D.H. Lawrence, George Moore, Ernest Newman, George Bernard Shaw, and J.R.R. Tolkien, which gives some idea of the range of Blissett's interests. In "[The Liturgy of Parsifal](#)" (1979)<sup>32</sup> Blissett summarizes Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and considers how this source influenced Wagner's ideas about the Grail legend (Blissett notes that Wolfram never referred to the Grail as 'Holy').<sup>33</sup> Wagner's religious upbringing is touched upon, in order to attempt an interpretation of the allusions in *Parsifal* to Christian baptism and the eucharist. "*Parsifal* is inescapably sacred, or profane ... if this is not 'redeeming,' it is sacrilegious," Blissett observes (p. 118). In the end, however, he seems somewhat ambivalent on this very question, one that has vexed commentators on *Parsifal* from the beginning.

The supervisor of Blissett's PhD thesis was Northrop Frye (1912–1991), and I suspect it was at Blissett's invitation that Frye gave a talk on "The World as Music and Idea in Wagner's *Parsifal*" for the Toronto Wagner Society on October 27, 1982.<sup>34</sup> I was in the audience on that occasion; it was a spellbinding performance. The lecture has been published several times; the authoritative version is the one found in Frye's *Collected Works*.<sup>35</sup> Frye was an unusual choice

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen McClatchie, "Narrative Theory and Music; or, the Tale of Kundry's Tale," *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 18.1 (1997): 1–18.

<sup>32</sup> William Blissett, "The Liturgy of *Parsifal*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 49.2 (1979): 117–138. Blissett served as the editor of *UTQ* from 1965 to 1976.

<sup>33</sup> Wagner put Wolfram von Eschenbach on stage as a character in his earlier work *Tannhäuser* (1845).

<sup>34</sup> Correspondence concerning Frye's talk for the TWS is in Box 68, folder 3 of the Northrop Frye fonds, held at Victoria University Library, but I have been unable to consult the relevant materials due to library closures.

<sup>35</sup> Northrop Frye, "The World as Music and Idea in Wagner's *Parsifal*," Chapter 27 in *Northrop Frye's Writings on the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Imre Salusinszky (*Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, vol. 17) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005): 326–340. Page number references are to this version.

of speaker for the *Parsifal* centennial; as Jean O’Grady notes, as a young man he had a deep-seated aversion to Wagner, and never particularly warmed to the composer.<sup>36</sup> Frye opened his talk by saying “On the subject of Wagner I have to speak as a pure outsider,” striking a humble tone at the outset, while at the same time subtly likening himself to Parsifal, the archetypal “pure outsider” (perhaps Frye felt that the Toronto Wagner Society was in need of a redeemer). Frye dedicates much of his talk to the mythic elements of *Parsifal*, stating that Wagner will always be peripheral to the Grail legend, because “he obliterates the Arthurian context” of the story. “A Grail story without an Arthurian court is as disembodied as an *Odyssey* without Ithaca,” Frye observes wryly (p. 328). His ruminations on the Grail legend range widely, from pre-Christian nature myths and Chrétien de Troyes through Shakespeare and Milton to Tolkien and T.S. Eliot. Frye concludes that *Parsifal* is neither Christian nor Buddhist nor pagan in orientation, but rather inspired by Schopenhauer’s *Die Welt as Wille und Vorstellung* (alluded to in Frye’s title for his talk). That Frye was a well-trained literate musician is evident in his concluding remarks, which offer a cogent and illuminating consideration of the tonal structure of *Parsifal*, and of the use of diatonic and chromatic idioms to portray the opposed realms of the Grail and Klingsor respectively. The essay is beautifully written, deeply insightful, and essential reading.

Father M. Owen Lee (1930–2019) was a friend of Blissett and another founding member of the Toronto Wagner Society. He was a Roman Catholic priest (Basilian Fathers), a professor of classics at St. Michael’s College in the University of Toronto, and known to millions of radio listeners for his Opera Quiz appearances and intermission commentaries on the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts from 1983 to 2006, often accompanied by musical illustrations that he played himself on the piano. If Frye was an outsider on the subject of Wagner, Lee was the most intimate of insiders. He gave the inaugural lecture for the Toronto Wagner Society on Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* (his favorite opera, which he saw dozens of times and wrote a fine book about), and contributed another six lectures on Wagner for the TWS over the years.<sup>37</sup> Of the 22 books that he published, four are on Wagner: *Wagner’s Ring: Turning the Sky Around* (1990), *Wagner, the Terrible Man and his Truthful Art* (1999), *Athena Sings: Wagner and the Greeks* (2003), and *Wagner and the Wonder of Art: An Introduction to Die Meistersinger* (2007). His insights on *Parsifal* appear as the chapter “The Holy Grail” in *The Olive-Tree Bed and Other Quests*, which originated as the Robson Classical Lectures that he gave at Victoria College in the University of Toronto in October 1995.<sup>38</sup>

The leitmotif for Lee’s Robson Lectures was the *quest*, as explored in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Goethe’s *Faust*, and *Parsifal*. Lee notes that the central symbol of *Parsifal* is the Holy Grail, “the most famous object in all the literature of heroic questing” (p. 71). He begins by covering much the same ground as Frye, examining the sources of the Grail legend and how the story developed over the centuries. Lee explains what Wagner invented or added to the story: the spear that wounded Amfortas, in Wagner’s telling, is the same spear that pierced Christ on the cross. Furthermore, Wagner unites that spear with the cup Jesus drank from at the Last Supper to fashion a composite Holy Grail (spear + cup). The separation of the spear from the cup, and the desperate need to have them reunited, is Wagner’s invention and the symbolic crux of his drama.

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<sup>36</sup> Jean O’Grady, “Northrop Frye and Wagner,” *Wagner News* (January–May 2015): 2–3, available online [here](#). See also Bob Denham, “Frye and Music,” *The Educated Imagination* website, online [here](#).

<sup>37</sup> Iain Scott, “Father Owen Lee [obituary],” *Toronto Wagner Society* website (7 August 2019), online [here](#).

<sup>38</sup> M. Own Lee, “The Holy Grail,” Chapter 4 in *The Olive-Tree Bed and Other Quests* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997): 70–96. The chapter is an altered and expanded version of a Metropolitan Opera intermission talk that was published in Lee’s *First Intermissions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 123–136.



Lee relates the story of *Parsifal* in detail, then asks three crucial questions: “What does it all mean?” (p. 86); “Is Wagner’s opera sacred or profane, moral or immoral, religious or anti-religious?” (p. 87); and “Is there anyone who really understands the last work of the master?” (p. 88). Lee realizes that many people remain either ambivalent about or hostile towards *Parsifal*, and notes that he only overcame his own initial misgivings about the work after hearing Hans Knappertsbusch conduct the Wieland Wagner staging at Bayreuth in 1963 (p. 153, n.20). Lee offers a Jungian interpretation of the Grail legend: Parsifal is the hero who meets his shadow in Act 1 (Amfortas), his anima in Act 2 (Kundry), and his Wise Old Man in Act 3 (Gurnemanz), then integrates these experiences by restoring the Grail to completeness (p. 89). Lee does not seem to be too invested in this interpretation, though. Like Frye, Lee finds Schopenhauer to be the key to understanding *Parsifal*. The *Wille* (acting in humans as insatiable longing) must be overcome, which Parsifal does by not succumbing to Kundry’s seduction in Act 2. Lee notes that Wagner’s interest in Buddhism is also reflected in *Parsifal*: “it was the Buddhist teaching on compassion that Wagner was drawn to” (p. 91)—“durch Mitleid wissend, der reine Tor.” It is only by empathizing with Amfortas’s suffering (“Amfortas! Die Wunde!”) that Parsifal arrives at a Buddhist-like state of compassion. This, for Wagner, was the transcendent answer to the *Parsifal* question: “Why is there suffering in the world?” As Lee puts it, “We suffer so that we can learn and—Wagner adds—help others who are suffering” (p. 92).

Lee does not shy away from the dark side of *Parsifal* and its creator, noting that it is not difficult to find Wagner’s more odious “pronouncements on race, religion, eugenics, socialism, and a score of other subjects mirrored in the opera’s text” (p. 92). While he does not exonerate Wagner, neither does he dwell on his iniquities; instead Lee moves on quickly to consider the influence that Wagner had on later generations of artists, noting simply that it is “an ambivalent legacy but an important one” (p. 93). In the conclusion to his talk, Lee raises many avenues for interpretation that cannot be summarized briefly. To put it in the baldest possible terms, Lee states that in *Parsifal* Wagner finds meaning in Christianity’s symbols and sacraments, even if he detested much of what Christianity had become in the nineteenth century. Wagner felt that Christianity needed a non-Christian (Parsifal/Wagner)<sup>39</sup> to illuminate the deeper meaning in its symbols and restore its potency; “Erlösung dem Erlöser!” (“Redemption to the Redeemer!”) as the final words of *Parsifal* assert. But just as Wagner found himself in Parsifal, so we too can find ourselves in *Parsifal*, Lee says. The suffering, the hatred, the twin castles as the opposing poles of our unconscious mind, and the hope for redemption through compassion, all represent our journey to overcome our own limitations and heal ourselves. “Who is the Grail? You are the Grail” Lee concludes (p. 96).

Lee’s essay offers the accumulated wisdom of a brilliant man who spent much of his life (from the age of 11, when he first heard a radio broadcast of *Tannhäuser* from the Met) thinking about and interpreting Wagner, and had deep insight into *Parsifal*. Unlike many academics, who write mainly for other scholars, Lee was deeply concerned with making his ideas intelligible to the average radio listener/reader. His essay provides an excellent introduction to *Parsifal*.

Another University of Toronto English Department faculty member with close ties to the Toronto Wagner Society is Linda Hutcheon (b. 1947), co-chair of the society from 1996 to 1999. Her husband is Michael Hutcheon (b. 1945), Professor of Medicine at University of Toronto; the couple has spoken and written about opera extensively, with many contributions on Wagner, a

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<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, in the postscript to his essay “Der Fall Wagner” from 1888, equated Wagner not with Parsifal but rather with another character in the opera: he called Wagner the “Klingsor of all Klingsors.”

joint passion ever since the couple attended the Harry Kupfer *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth in 1989.<sup>40</sup> One of their first contributions to opera scholarship was an essay about *Parsifal* published in the *Cambridge Opera Journal*.<sup>41</sup> Their article reminds us that Amfortas's sin was sexual in nature; throughout history sexuality has been connected to suffering and disease, from the arrival of syphilis in Europe in 1492, to the AIDS crisis of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Hutcheons observe that Wagner's decision to displace Amfortas's wound from his genitals to his side may enhance the Christian symbolism of the story, but it also distracts attention from the fact that his disease is sexual in origin. Examining exactly what the libretto tells us of the wound, the Hutcheons conclude that it is a manifestation of the tertiary stage of syphilis. Common therapies for this condition in the nineteenth century included baths and the application of balsam, which is exactly the treatment Amfortas undergoes in Act 1. As early as the sixteenth century, syphilis was interpreted as a punishment inflicted by God upon sinners, making it a singularly fitting retribution for Amfortas's prior actions in Klingsor's realm. The theory that Kundry is Jewish and that Amfortas's wound thus represents racial as well as sexual contamination is aired, but for the purposes of their argument, the Hutcheons prioritize the sexual interpretation. The moral stain associated with syphilis in the nineteenth century was seen not just as a personal failing, but moreover as a symptom of a society in decline, which is exactly the situation in *Parsifal*, for Amfortas's transgression has brought the entire Grail realm into a state of advanced decay. The only cure is for the sexually pure Parsifal to take over leadership of the kingdom, representing "the sanctified or legitimated—and thus non-diseased—union of male and female" (p. 273). It seems a decidedly ironic message to be issuing from the profligate Wagner.<sup>42</sup>

The Hutcheons returned to *Parsifal* briefly in their most recent book to date on opera, *Four Last Songs* (2015).<sup>43</sup> The book is, as the subtitle tells us, a study of "aging and creativity," or more precisely, creativity in old age, as seen in the work of four opera composers: Verdi, Strauss, Messiaen, and Britten. Wagner's *Parsifal* appears here not as a detailed case study, but rather as a foil to Verdi's *Falstaff*. When writing his previous opera, *Otello*, Verdi had asked his publisher Ricordi for copies of *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*, and so we know that he was intimately familiar with Wagner's last work when he wrote his own final opera, *Falstaff*. The Hutcheons note that *Falstaff* can be read as an "echoing parody" of *Parsifal*; "his last opera's relative brevity, its short melodic lines, its seeming refusal to repeat melodies, and even its hectic pace can all be read as ironic comments upon the length of line, frequency of motivic repetition, stately slowness, and sheer length of *Parsifal*" (p. 34). The *Parsifal* references in *Falstaff* even include a direct musical quotation, employed ironically by Verdi (Figs. 2 and 3, p. 37). The Hutcheons note that Verdi's last opera is about "age and its sensual pleasures—rather than about abdication of responsibility, death, and the renunciation of the flesh (as in *Parsifal*)" (p. 39).

The Chair of the Toronto Wagner Society, [Frances Henry](#) (b. 1931), has also written about *Parsifal*. She is a professor emerita of anthropology at York University and an expert on

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<sup>40</sup> See "Linda and Michael Hutcheon," *Wagner Moments: A Celebration of Favorite Wagner Experiences*, ed. J.K. Holoman (New York: Amadeus Press, 2007): 95–97 for a charming account of their first experience of Bayreuth.

<sup>41</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon, "Syphilis, Sin and the Social Order: Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7.3 (1995): 261–275. An expanded version of the article appears (with the same title) as Chapter 3 in their first book on opera, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996): 61–94.

<sup>42</sup> An alternative medical interpretation of Amfortas's wound, not aired by the Hutcheons, is that it reflected Wagner's personal experience of a wound which would not heal, namely his haemorrhoids, for which he had special ring-shaped cushions made. Nietzsche suffered from the same affliction.

<sup>43</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon, *Four Last Songs: Aging and Creativity in Verdi, Strauss, Messiaen, and Britten* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

racism and anti-racism. Her “Reflections on a Most Unusual *Parsifal*” is a consideration of the much discussed production of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth by the German filmmaker and director Christoph Schlingensief (1960–2010).<sup>44</sup> This staging debuted in 2004; Henry attended in 2006 and again in 2007, the final year the production was mounted. Henry notes that “the majority of the critique around the Schlingensief production has been hostile and critical”; indeed, one poll voted it “the worst Wagnerian production ever” (p. 169). Henry writes that Schlingensief created a multi-ethnic, anti-religious staging in which African visual elements are prominent. She is broadly sympathetic towards Schlingensief, but for this reader, his extensive use of blackface makes the production not just ambiguous or controversial, but deeply problematic.

A leading contemporary scholar of *Parsifal* is the Canadian-American musicologist and pianist William Kinderman (b. 1952), who has written one book on the work ([Oxford University Press](#), 2013) and co-edited another ([Camden House](#), 2005). He was born in Philadelphia and is a faculty member at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. From 1980 to 1989 he was on faculty at the University of Victoria School of Music, and he was also an International Visiting Scholar at [Queen’s University](#) in 2013. His co-editor of the Camden House book on *Parsifal* is his wife, Katherine R. Syer (b. 1967), who is also on faculty at UIUC; she completed her PhD at the University of Victoria School of Music in 1999 under his supervision with a thesis on musical and psychological processes in Wagner.

Kinderman’s *Parsifal* (2013) is a major contribution to Wagner scholarship and a wide-ranging account of the sources (literary and musical), creation, reception, and dramatic/musical characteristics of the work. The author attempts valiantly to disentangle *Parsifal* from the vile accretions of interpretation it accrued during the Third Reich by writers such as Alfred Lorenz and those members of the Bayreuth Circle who were committed Nazis. The discussion of the literary sources examines two eighteenth-century works not previously given much attention by Wagner scholars. Gozzi’s play *La donna serpente* (“The Woman as Snake”) which Wagner drew upon for his first opera, *Die Feen* (The Fairies), is a source for the dramatic conclusion to Act 2 (the destruction of Klingsor’s magic garden).<sup>45</sup> And in Gluck’s opera *Armide*, the first opera that Wagner conducted as *Kapellmeister* in Dresden, the conflict between Rinaldo and Armide can be compared to that between Parsifal and Kundry; in addition there is a kind of premonition of the Flower Maidens scene in Gluck’s opera.

In his long discussion of the musical genesis of *Parsifal*, Kinderman examines over 70 sketches, two complete drafts (one in pencil, one in ink), and the autograph score. The sketches, while mostly at the Wagner Archives in Bayreuth, still had to be reassembled “much like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle” (p. 83). These sketches can be compared with Cosima’s diary entries to provide a detailed account of the entire creative process for the music for *Parsifal*. Preliminary sketching began in February 1876, but sustained composition did not start until August 1877; one reason for the delay in getting down to serious work on *Parsifal* was the first Bayreuth *Ring* cycle in the summer of 1876. (Whatever its dramatic and musical motivations may have been, one reason that Wagner wrote *Parsifal* and wanted performances of it confined to Bayreuth was to pay off the enormous debts incurred by the Bayreuth *Ring* cycle.) Work on *Parsifal* continued without interruption beginning in August 1877; Act 1 was finished in draft form in January 1878,

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<sup>44</sup> Frances Henry, “Reflections on a Most Unusual *Parsifal*: Bayreuth and Christoph Schlingensief,” Chapter 10 in *Opera in a Multicultural World*, ed. Mary I. Ingraham, Joseph K. So and Roy Moodley (New York: Routledge, 2016): 167–177.

<sup>45</sup> Kinderman here draws upon Katherine R. Syer’s article “‘It left me no peace’: From Carlo Gozzi’s *La donna serpente* to Wagner’s *Parsifal*,” *Musical Quarterly* 94.3 (Fall 2011): 325–380.

Act 2 in October 1878, and Act 3 in April 1879. Retouching of details followed in September 1879. Kinderman notes that “Wagner’s preparatory work on the autograph manuscript proceeded slowly” (p. 184) and it was not until a year later, September 1880, that the writing out of the final, orchestrated version of the score began. This process was interrupted in March 1881 when Wagner learned that he had to write another three or four minutes of music for the transformation scene in Act 1, which he duly created. (The music still proved to be a little bit too short for the scenic requirements, so Engelbert Humperdinck [added a brief passage](#); his contribution was dropped later when the mechanism of the scenic transformation was improved.<sup>46</sup>) The last bar of the autograph manuscript full score was completed in Palermo, Sicily, on January 13, 1882.

In his detailed discussion of the musico-dramatic structure of *Parsifal*, which constitutes Part 2 of the book, Kinderman notes large-scale thematic recurrences and key relationships, and explains how these act to tie the work together. The Prelude foreshadows the Grail Scene at the end of Act 1; “core passages in Gurnemanz’s narrative [in Act 1] ... prepare weighty parts of Act 2” set in Klingsor’s realm; and Act 3 is a varied, transformed recapitulation of Act 1. These correspondences “are dramatically important and musically tangible” (p. 203). Kinderman examines some striking parallels, musically and dramatically, between *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, and compares Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* with *Parsifal* as two examples of “late style.” Mann began work on his novel in April 1943, and at that time he wrote to his son Klaus, “It will be my *Parsifal*” (p. 224). Kinderman offers comments on a few *Parsifal* productions, including Wieland Wagner’s, seen from 1951 to 1973 at Bayreuth and elsewhere, and the Schlingensiefel staging discussed by Frances Henry. He ends by considering the enigma of Kundry: after she dies, is she “merely consigned to oblivion or does she ascend into nirvana, freed at last from her cycle of reincarnations?” (p. 297) Kinderman concludes that her fate, and indeed the meaning of *Parsifal*, raise “urgent questions that will continue to arouse debate” (p. 301).

Jean-Jacques Nattiez (b. 1945) worked at the Bayreuth Festival in 1962 as a machinist, and from that humble beginning rose to become one of the leading Wagner scholars in the world. Born in France, he was appointed to Université de Montréal in 1970 and became a Canadian citizen in 1975. He has enjoyed an illustrious career as a pioneer in the field of music semiology and has published six books on Wagner to date: *Tétralogies—Wagner, Boulez, Chéreau: essai sur l’infidélité* (1983); *Wagner androgyne* (1990; English transl. by Stewart Spencer, 1993); *Les esquisses de Richard Wagner pour Siegfried’s Tod (1850): essai de poétique* (2004); *Analyses et interprétations de la musique: la mélodie du berger dans le Tristan et Isolde de Wagner* (2013); *Wagner antisémite: un problème historique, sémiologique et esthétique* (2015); and *Les récits cachés de Richard Wagner: art poétique, rêve et sexualité du Vaisseau fantôme à Parsifal* (2018). Most of these books are intended for the specialist scholarly reader, but *Les récits cachés* [“The Hidden Stories”] is accessible to the general reader, touches upon many of the themes that Nattiez explores in his earlier writings, and has a chapter on *Parsifal*.

*Les récits cachés* discusses all of Wagner’s mature operas in chronological order in short chapters, ending with “*Parsifal: L’androgyne asexuée*” (“*Parsifal: the asexual androgyne*”). This chapter offers a novel reading of *Parsifal* based on ideas that Nattiez had presented earlier in his book *Wagner Androgyne*. Nattiez closely examines the prose writings that Wagner completed at the time he was working on *Parsifal*, and they paint a very disturbing picture; they are rife with misogyny and anti-Semitism, and Nattiez asserts that the same themes are expressed in *Parsifal*. Klingsor, the Flower Maidens, and Kundry all represent the oriental/Jewish/female “Other” and

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<sup>46</sup> The Vancouver artist Rodney Graham (b. 1949) has created a series of artworks related to *Parsifal*, and more specifically inspired by [Humperdinck’s added bars](#).

the extinction of Klingsor's realm and the death of Kundry can be interpreted as representing the suppression of women and the extermination of the Jews. *Parsifal* thus becomes, for Nattiez, the harbinger of a new religion that will be rid of all traces of Judaism, and Parsifal will be the androgynous leader of this new religion.

Nattiez observes that Kundry dies at the very moment Parsifal attains redemption, while a mixed choir sings "Erlösung dem Erlöser!" ("Redemption to the Redeemer!"). Nattiez quotes a diary entry by Cosima dated June 27, 1880 that explains the androgynous meaning of the finale: "[R.] plays the main theme of *Parsifal* to himself, and returning, explains to me that he gave these words to a choir so that the effect is neither feminine nor masculine; Christ must present human traits in general, *neither man nor woman*." Nattiez states that *Parsifal* presents an asexual androgyny that transcends racial and gendered differences. "*Parsifal* mène le mythe androgyne jusqu'à son terme: dans l'esprit du compositeur, le *Bühnenweihfestspiel* achève à la fois son œuvre et l'histoire de la musique occidentale mais en même temps, il ouvre une ère religieuse nouvelle" ["*Parsifal* brings the androgynous myth to its conclusion: in the composer's mind, the *Bühnenweihfestspiel* completes both his own œuvre and the history of Western music, but at the same time ushers in a new religious era"]. The religious angle of Nattiez's reading is closely related to the view that Guillaume Couture expressed in 1884 when he wrote that Wagner's music is a religion, with Bayreuth as its temple, and Wagner as the god.

Nattiez has written about *Parsifal* on other occasions as well. In his *Proust as Musician* (1984; English transl. by Derrick Puffett, 1989), there is a chapter titled "*Parsifal* as redemptive model for the redemptive work" (pp. 12–33), in which Nattiez examines the influence of *Parsifal* on [À la recherche du temps perdu](#). And in 2002, Nattiez interviewed Pierre Boulez about his experiences of Wagner in general, and in particular of conducting *Parsifal* and the Chéreau *Ring* cycle at the Bayreuth Festival.<sup>47</sup> Boulez conducted *Parsifal* at Bayreuth 1966–68 and 1970 (the Wieland Wagner production), and 2004–05 (the Schlingensief production).

Nattiez has also been very active as a public intellectual, giving talks on Wagner (among many other topics) in over 20 countries. He organized a conference on *Parsifal* at Université de Montréal in 1992, in connection with the Metropolitan Opera production by Otto Schenk, with set designs by Günther Schneider-Siemssen, that was first mounted in 1991 and was broadcast on television in 1992.<sup>48</sup> The Schenk production remained in service at the Met until 2006, and then after seven years without a *Parsifal* in its repertoire, the Met turned to the Canadian team of François Girard and Michael Levine for a new production. On May 5, 2013 Nattiez discussed this new *Parsifal* production in a [public interview](#) with François Girard, just a few months after the Metropolitan Opera had staged it for the first time. And that brings us full circle, for it is this Girard/Levine production that the Canadian Opera Company plans to mount in September and October of this year, should the gods and the Ontario provincial government be willing.

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<sup>47</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez (transl. Jonathan Goldman), "Wagner Through the Looking Glass of Boulez: An Interview with Jean-Jacques Nattiez," *WagnerSpectrum* (Würzburg, Germany) 2.2 (2006): 169–191. The interview took place in 2002, was revised by Boulez in 2005, and then was published in 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre remarks that a brochure for this conference, which (wrongly) stated that *Parsifal* had never been given in Montreal, inspired her essay "La musique de Wagner au Québec au tournant du XXe siècle," (1992); her essay, along with the similar one by Carl Morey (1998) about early Wagner performances in Toronto, were valuable sources of information in my hunt for documentation about *Parsifal* and Canada.