



The German composer Richard Wagner was one of the major creative figures of the nineteenth century. A great man of the theatre, in his middle years he composed an unbroken succession of operatic masterpieces: *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), *Tannhauser* (1845), *Lohengrin* (1848), *Tristan and Isolde* (1859), *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* (1867), and *The Ring of the Nibelungs* (1852-1874). His final opera was *Parsifal* (1882). He established the Bayreuth Festival for the performance of his music. He died after an eventful life in 1883.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, or *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, was Wagner's only mature comedy, and his only work dealing with ordinary historical figures. The plot focuses upon the cobbler-poet Hans Sachs (1494-1576) and the Guild of Mastersingers. A wealthy member of the Guild, Pogner, has decided to offer his daughter, Eva, in marriage to the winner of a singing

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883): DIE MEISTERSINGER'S OVERTURE

contest. The young hero Walther is in love with Eva, and decides to enter the contest but is unaware of its complex rules. With the aid of Sachs, and despite the bitter opposition of Beckmesser, who also aspires to marry Eva, Walther wins the contest with his prize song, and so the hand of Eva.

Wagner created some of his finest music for the opera, which covers a very wide range of dramatic and emotional situations, but which is dominated above all by the fresh enthusiasm of young love, tempered by the wisdom of the Mastersingers, as personified by Sachs. The Overture opens with the majestic theme associated with the Mastersingers themselves, and goes on to encompass many of the principal musico-dramatic themes of the opera, before concluding, as it began, with music of impressive pomp and ceremony with which the operatic action is launched.

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