

***Die Walküre* from *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*
Analysis of Act 1, Scene 3**

Die Walküre, the “first day” of the three music dramas of *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* (to be preceded the evening before by *Das Rheingold*)¹, was composed between 1852 and 1856, and first performed in Munich in 1870.² In this opera (I use this term for simplicity rather than the wordier “music drama”) we meet Siegmund and Sieglinde – brother and sister, both children of Wotan – who fall passionately in love, leading to the birth of Siegfried, the central character of the next, eponymous opera *Siegfried*. (*Die Walküre* also features the introduction of Brünnhilde, the Valkyrie referenced in the opera’s title, but she is not on stage until the second and third acts, so is outside the scope of this paper.)

The first act has three scenes. In the first scene we meet Siegmund, who is escaping from battle, and then Sieglinde, who tends to him in her hut. The second scene brings in Hunding, Sieglinde’s husband, his conversation with Siegmund, and at the end his demand for a duel to the death the next morning, Hunding realizing from Siegmund’s story that he is the foe who has killed Hunding’s kinsmen.³ With that we come to the third scene, the subject of this paper.

It is useful to split the scene into a number of subsections, to facilitate analysis. Briefly, I have divided the scene as follows:

1. Siegmund is alone, bemoaning his fate with Hunding while yearning for the woman he has met, then seeing the glimmer of a sword in an ash tree, and reflecting further on Sieglinde, ending at “*tief in des Busens Berge glimmt nur noch lichtlose Gluth!*” (“Deep in my sheltering breast a flameless fire still smoulders!”)⁴
2. Sieglinde enters, telling Siegmund she has drugged Hunding, then she relates the story of her wedding to him, with the strange guest and his burying a sword in the ash tree, where only the strongest man could dislodge it (which none could); then Siegmund’s first declaration of love, ending at “*halt’ ich die Hehre umfassen, fühl’ ich dein schlagendes Herz!*” (“As I hold the proud woman within my embrace, and feel your beating heart!”)
3. The full moon suddenly allowing Siegmund and Sieglinde to see each other leads to ardent exchanges of love, starting with Siegmund’s Spring Song “*Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond*” (“Winter’s storms have waned at May’s awakening”)⁵, the centerpiece of the scene; then Sieglinde’s reply, and ending with Siegmund’s “*Seligstes Weib!*” (“Most blessed of women!”)
4. More rapturous exchanges of love between Siegmund and Sieglinde follow, with her recognizing the look of the wedding stranger in him (she knows the stranger to have been Wotan), leading to her question – preceded by a complete orchestral stop, the only one in the scene – “*Wehwalt heiß’st du fürwahr?*” (“Is Wehwalt really what you are called?”)
5. Siegmund tells Sieglinde that Wälse (Wotan) was his father, so her knowing him to be her brother; then “beside herself” (stage direction “*außer sich*”)⁶ she names

him Siegmund (“guardian of victory”)⁷; in reply he leaps up, declares the sword to be rightfully his, naming it Nothung (“Needful”)⁸, and then pulling it out of the tree; Sieglinde’s declaration that Siegmund has won her to him with the sword, and Siegmund’s final words “*Braut und Schwester bist du dem Bruder – so blühe denn Wälsungen-Blut!*” (“Bride and sister you are to your brother – so let the blood of the Wälsungs blossom!”), the curtain then falling quickly (“*der Vorhang fällt schnell*”) on the lovers passionately embracing – decorously ending the scene and the first act.

(Please refer to Appendix A for a summary of the subsections of this scene, including score references, along with the tonal centers used.)

Looking first at the text, it seems rather amazing that Wagner can create this amount of poetic verse on the exchanges of the two lovers, and when sung amounts to the better part of the half hour scene⁹, but in this he succeeds admirably. Felicitous examples include subsection 1 where Siegmund exclaims about Sieglinde, “*zu der mich nun Sehnsucht zieht, die mit süßem Zauber mich sehr*” (“she to whom yearning draws me now, and who wounds me with sweet enchantment”), and subsection 4 where Sieglinde declares “*Mir zagt es vor der Wonne, die mich entzückt*” (“I tremble to tell of the bliss that transports me”).

As mentioned in the description of subsection 3, the Spring Song is the centerpiece of the scene, occurring about halfway through its total length. While the rest of the scene’s text is sung in a declamatory style, the Spring Song is notable in featuring quatrains – seven of them, ending with “*uns trennte von ihm*” (“divided us from him”) –

for the better part of the song.¹⁰ The examples above of poetic verse in English do not adequately convey the beauty of the German, particularly in this song, with Wagner's use of *Stabreim*¹¹ or alliterative verse especially of consonants, such as the beginning words "*Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond*", or the second quatrain "*auf linden Lüften leicht und lieblich, Wunder webend er sich wiegt*" ("on balmy breezes, light and lovely, working wonders he wafts this way").

On the subject of leitmotifs (below simply called motifs), Peter Billam has compiled a list of 13 different motifs used in the scene.¹² Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, not attempting to be comprehensive¹³, highlight seven key motifs, combining the siblings' love motif and Freia's love motif.¹⁴ (These are identified in Appendix B.) The two motifs most featured are the Sword motif and the Love motif. The Sword motif is normally in C major, but at the beginning of the scene it is heard, slightly altered, in a minor key played by low strings (61/2/1-3, 61/2/9-11, 61/3/4-5, 62/1/1-2 (played by bass trumpet))¹⁵, underpinning Siegmund's predicament in having to battle Hunding the next morning. But the next occurrences are in C major, as when Siegmund first sees the buried sword (64/2/3-5, 65/1/4-65/2/1) played by trumpet "*sehr bestimmt*" ("very determined"), supported by shimmering 16th note figurations in the violins (with many other occurrences following). Some other key uses are during Sieglinde's wedding story of the stranger and burying the sword (74/1/5-7 played by bass trumpet, 80/1/1-3 played by trumpet, 80/2/6-81/1/1-4 played first by bass trumpet and then trumpet), and Siegmund's triumphant removal of the sword at the end of the scene (139/1/5-6 played by bass trumpet, 140/1/6-8 played by horns then 140/1/8-140/2/1-2 played by trumpet, 143/1/1-144/1/2 played first by trumpets and then bass trumpet, 158/1/1-5 played first by

bass tubas, then by trumpets and trombones). Most all of these occurrences are in C major, played by brass.

The Love motif, having two distinct parts, is first heard at Siegmund's yearning in subsection 1 (63/1/3-4 and 63/1/5-6 played by solo cello supported by *divisi* cellos). Then in the Spring Song it is heard again in long held notes by the winds (101/1/4-103/1/1). Sieglinde's response uses the motif (111/1/2-112/1/2 sung by her, 116/1/1-161/2/2 played by violins), and also is used in the impassioned exchanges that follow (124/1/3-125/1/1 played by violins, supporting Sieglinde's motivic use at 124/1/4-125/1/1). The last occurrences, with Siegmund's words "*Braut und Schwester*" ("brother and sister") are played in the high winds (157/1/1-157/2/1) in a *forte* passage appropriate to the end of the scene.

Two more motifs are particularly worthy of mention. The Hunding motif is heard at the beginning, but only as its rhythmic skeleton of two 32nd's, three triplet 8th's and a dotted 8th/16th followed by quarter note (61/2/5-6 played by timpani, carried over from the end of Scene 2 (61/1/1-2), then 61/3/1-6 ff. played by horns). The pattern is repeated, becoming more insistent, up to Siegmund's desperate "*Wälse!*" (63/2/1-63/3/5)

The Valhalla motif is interesting because it is used when referring to the stranger at the wedding (Wotan), as in "*ein Fremder trat da herein*" ("a stranger then came in"), at 76/1/4-76/2/2, played by bassoons and horns, then again at "*Da Wußt' ich, wer der war*" ("I knew then who he was") at 80/1/5-81/1/2 played by strings supported by horns. One final occurrence is at the end of subsection 4 "*so blickte der Greis*" ("so the greybeard looked") at 134/1/5-134/2 played by horns, followed by 134/2/3-135/1/6 in slightly altered form played by the strings.

(For completeness, the remaining three motifs listed by Spencer and Millington are: 1) Wotan's spear, used at 140/2/1-3 in simplified form played by low strings; 2) "*Heiligster Minne Noth höchst Noth*", sung twice by Siegmund at 140/2/8-141/1/5; and 3) Wälsungs, used at 86/2/3-4 played by brass at Siegmund's first declaration of love, at 134/1/2-5 played by low strings (along with the Sword theme) just before Sieglinde asks Siegmund's name, and at 146/1/1-2 played by brass after Siegmund pulls out the sword.)

As can be seen from these examples, Wagner uses orchestral forces to support the motivic features, such as brass for the "noble" Sword and Valhalla motifs, and shimmering strings or winds without brass for the Love motif.

The use of orchestra can be very light, in a recitative style, such as the beginning of the wedding story at 75/1/5-76/1/3, but in general there is a fuller use of forces, as in the continuation at 76/1/4. Looking more closely at orchestration, the strings alone (or with winds added) are typically used in quiet passages to emphasize the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde; examples include Siegmund's "*ein Weib sah' ich, wonning und hehr*" ("I saw a woman, winsome and fair") at 63/1/1-6, the beginning of the Spring Song (98/1/4), Sieglinde's reply "*was im Busen ich barg*" ("what I hid in my breast") at 117/1/1, before starting a crescendo, and Siegmund's "*in heißem Sehnen*" ("in fervent longing") followed by Sieglinde's "*Im Bach erblickt' ich*" ("my own likeness") at 130/1/3-131/1/5. The strings alone are also used *forte* for dramatic effect, as in supporting Siegmund's "*Wälse!*" at 64/1/1-4.

The scene is constantly ebbing and flowing from quiet passages to climactic moments, the latter (usually for passionate exchanges) in which fuller resources are needed. The brass, in addition to their role in the Sword and Valhalla motifs, or lending

weight (and more motifs!) to *forte* passages, can add a martial coloring, such as in the “busier” (“*Belebter*”) passage starting at 115/2/3, using horns along with winds. The winds are not used alone, but support either the strings in quiet passages, or with harps added, such as the start of subsection 2, with Sieglinde’s “*Ha, wer ging?*” (“Ha, who went out?”) at 93/1/1-96/1/3, giving a nicely varied coloration before the Spring Song introduction. And of course the winds are added to the rest of the orchestra for a richer sound in many places.

The main climactic moment comes when Siegmund declares in the last subsection, “*Siegmund heiß’ ich, und Siegmund bin ich*” (“Siegmund I’m called and Siegmund I am”), starting at 139/1/1 with a “very fast” (“*Sehr schnell*”) tempo marking and rapid repeating figures by the full orchestra, leading to a slightly broader “moderately fast” (“*Mäßig schnell*”), adding harp and string arpeggios in 16th notes, later adding “martial” brass at 153/1/1. The ending is “very busy” (“*Sehr belebt*”) at 156/1/1 followed by “always faster” (“*Immer schneller*”) at 157/1/1 for full orchestra, to underpin the passionate embrace of the two lovers.

As can be seen in Appendix A, there is not a discernable harmonic form for the scene. Instead, starting in F minor and ending in G major, the scene moves through several tonal centers, which are mostly in major keys, e.g. C major, Bb major (both Siegmund’s yearning and the start and end of the Spring Song), G major, Db major, and E major. The primary section in a minor key is Sieglinde’s wedding story in E minor, appropriate to her sadness at the unhappy marriage to Hunding.

Coming back to the Spring Song, in the Grove Music Online article on *Die Walküre* it is noted that the song starts as a ternary aria.¹⁶ The first section in Bb major

starting at 98/1/4, with an introduction at 96/1/4, comprises the first five quatrains, ending at “*entsprießt seiner Kraft*” (“sprout forth from his strength”), at 100/1/3. The second section starting at 100/1/4 is in D minor, making up the next two quatrains, ending at “*uns trennte von ihm*” (“divided us from him”) at 101/1/4. Both the first and second sections feature gently lilting strings in a 9/8 rhythm, with the introduction also using winds and horns, along with supporting chords from two harps. Remarkably, the last word “*ihm*” begins a completely different style for the third section (and not a return to the first section), featuring 32nd note arpeggios in the violas with added harp. No longer versified, this section has several climactic moments, including an agitated section with dotted triplet rhythms sung by Siegmund (106/1/2-107/1/3), and using various tonal centers, ending with “*Vereint sind Liebe und Lenz!*” (“United are Love and Spring!”) at 108/1/2-110/1/2 – back in the key of Bb major, so “rounding out” the form of the song and giving it something of a ternary flavor.

This brief description of the Spring Song’s form, and the *Stabreim* (alliteration) mentioned earlier, does not do justice to the great beauty of the song. Its central location helps to emphasize its special character, making it the highlight of this scene. And it is to be hoped that this makes a suitably appropriate ending to this analysis.

Appendix A: Diagram of Tonal Centers for *Die Walküre*: Act 1, Scene 3

Page references: full orchestral score, Peters Edition, *IMSLP Petrucci Music Library* (see Bibliography)

Note: page numbers in the score are one higher than those listed below, as the score's second page is marked p.3.

Subsection:	1	2	3	4	5
Score pages:	pp.61-72	pp.72-92	pp.93-121	pp.122-135	pp.135-161
Scene highlights:	<p><u>Sigmund alone</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sigmund bemoans his fate to fight Hunding His yearning for Sieglinde Sees the hilt of the buried sword in the ash tree More yearning for Sieglinde 	<p><u>Sigmund and Sieglinde</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sieglinde says she has drugged Hunding She relates the story of her wedding, and the stranger's appearance Burying of the sword; no one could remove it Sigmund's first declaration of love 	<p><u>Sigmund and Sieglinde</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moonlight allows the pair to see each other clearly Spring Song Sieglinde's response: "You are the Spring..." Sigmund's reply: "Most blessed of women!" 	<p><u>Sigmund and Sieglinde</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More exchanges of love between Sigmund and Sieglinde Sieglinde recognizes the wedding stranger's (Wotan) look in Sigmund She asks: "Is Wehwalt really what you are called?" 	<p><u>Sigmund and Sieglinde</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sigmund tells Sieglinde that Wälse was his father Recognizing him as her brother, Sieglinde names him Sigmund Sigmund declares the sword to be his, and pulls it out of the tree He declares: "So let the blood of the Wälungs blossom!"
Tonal centers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning: F minor w/ B minor dim. 7th (61/2/1) Yearning: Bb major (63/1/1) Sword: C major (64/2/4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning: C major (72/2/4) Wedding story: E minor (75/1/5) Sword buried: C major (78/2/3) "I knew then who he was": G major (80/1/5) Declaration of love: G minor to G major (86/2/4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring Song (A): Bb major (96/1/4) Spring Song (B): D minor (100/1/4) Spring Song (C): D major (101/1/4), ending in Bb major (110/1/2) Sieglinde's reply: Ab major => Db major (111/1/2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning: Db major (122/1/3) Various, leading to E major "a wonder seeks to forewarn me" (129/1/2) Sigmund's "A dream of love": C major (129/2/5) Sieglinde's "so the greybeard looked": E major (134/1/5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning: E major (135/2/4) Various, leading to D major on Sieglinde's naming Sigmund (false cadence) (138/2/4) Pulling out the sword: C major (139/1/3) Various, ending in G major (156/1/1)

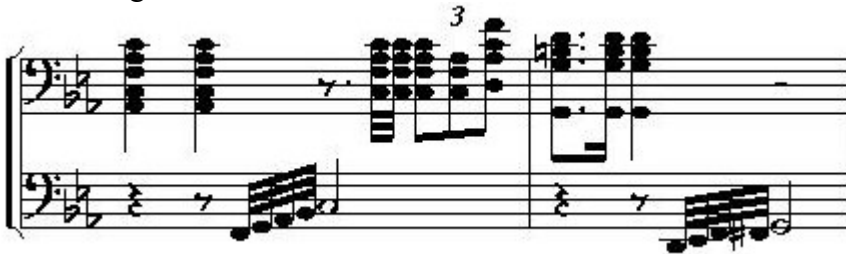
Appendix B: Key leitmotifs used in Act 1, Scene 3

(Identified in Spencer, Stewart and Barry Millington, ed. *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2010, pp.17-24. Examples taken from Billam, Peter. "The Leitmotifs of Wagner's Ring." See Bibliography.)

1. Sword:



2. Hunding:



3. Love motif (derived from Freia's love motif):



Also:



4. Valhalla:



5. Wotan's spear:



6. Siegmund's "Heiligster Minne Noth höchst Noth" ("Highest need of holiest love"):



7. Wälsungs:



Notes

1. Millington, Barry. "Der Ring des Nibelungen." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*.
2. Millington, Barry. "Die Walküre." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*.
3. Ibid.
4. All textual references to the libretto for *Die Walküre* and their English translation come from Spencer, Stewart and Barry Millington, ed. *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2010.
5. Millington, Barry. "Die Walküre." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*.
6. All stage directions in the score come from Wagner, Richard: "Die Walküre, WWV 86B". *IMSLP Petrucci Music Library*. Full orchestral score, Peters Edition, starting on p.61.
7. Millington, Barry. "Die Walküre." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*.
8. Ibid.
9. Timings for the scene from three recordings listed in the Bibliography are: 1) Staatskapelle Dresden/Marek Janowski: 27 minutes; 2) Festspielhaus Bayreuth/Pierre Boulez: 27 minutes; 3) Festspielhaus Bayreuth/Daniel Barenboim: 28 minutes.
10. I consider the end of the Spring Song to be Siegmund's last words "vereint sind Liebe und Lenz!" ("United are Love and Spring!"), just before Sieglinde responds.
11. Spencer, Stewart. "Stabreim." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*.
12. Leitmotif references come from Billam, Peter. "The Leitmotifs of Wagner's Ring." See Bibliography for link.
13. Spencer, Stewart and Barry Millington, ed. *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2010, p.15.
14. Ibid., pp.131-139.
15. Page references are from the full orchestral score, Peters Edition, *IMSLP Petrucci Music Library* (see Bibliography). Note: page numbers in the score are one higher than those listed, as the score's second page is marked p.3.
16. Millington, Barry. "Die Walküre." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*.

Bibliography

Billam, Peter. "The Leitmotifs of Wagner's Ring." Accessed November 23, 2015.

<http://www.pjb.com.au/mus/wagner/index.html#wal>

Millington, Barry. "Der Ring des Nibelungen." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*. Accessed November 23, 2015 via UNLV Music Library page:

<https://www.library.unlv.edu/music/collections/electronic.php#I>

Millington, Barry. "Die Walküre." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*. Accessed November 23, 2015 via UNLV Music Library page (see Millington above).

Richard Wagner: Der Ring des Nibelungen. CD-ROM. Sony Music, 2014.

Siegfried: Siegfried Jerusalem; Sieglinde: Jessye Norman; Staatskapelle Dresden, Marek Janowski. Act I Scene III is on disc 3, tracks 6-12.

Spencer, Stewart and Barry Millington, ed. *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2010.

Spencer, Stewart. "Stabreim." *Oxford/Grove Music Online*. Accessed November 23, 2015 via UNLV Music Library page (see Millington above).

Wagner, Richard: "Die Walküre, WWV 86B". *IMSLP Petrucci Music Library*. Accessed November 23, 2015.

http://imslp.org/wiki/Die_Walk%C3%BCre,_WWV_86B_%28Wagner,_Richard%29

Full orchestral score, Peters Edition, of Act I is found under subheading 2.1.1 "Front Matter and Act I (Complete)" – scene 3 starts on p.61 (shown as p.62 in the score).
Vocal score with piano reduction, Schott Edition, is found under subheading 2.3 "Complete Score, #14088" – scene 3 starts on p.37.

"Wagner – Der Ring Des Nibelungen: Die Walküre [Act I/II; Boulez] – English Subs." *YouTube (Standard YouTube License)*. Accessed November 23, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnKxz5PBr8M>

Siegfried: Peter Hofmann; Sieglinde: Jeannine Altmeyer; Festspielhaus Bayreuth, Pierre Boulez. Act I Scene III begins at 35:52.

“Wagner – Die Walküre, Bayreuth 1992 (Barenboim, Tomlinson, Elming, Secunde).”
YouTube (Standard YouTube License). Accessed November 23, 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nuu9Rr1o9w>

Siegmond: Poul Elming; Sieglinde: Nadine Secunde; Festspielhaus Bayreuth, Daniel Barenboim. Act I Scene III begins at 38:52.

“Walküre Act 1, Scene 3 2009.” *YouTube (Standard YouTube License)*. Accessed November 23, 2015. Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r_62gDK9C0;
Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezzoexKe6fo>

Siegmond: Wolfgang Schmidt; Sieglinde: Jeanne Piland; Düsseldorfer Symphoniker, John Fiore.