

Richard Wagner's Trauermusik, WWV73 (Trauersinfonie)

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On December 14, 1844 the remains of Carl Maria von Weber were moved from English to German soil. Weber had died in England while on tour and was buried in a foreign land. When word of his death reached Germany, efforts to bring his remain back to Germany ensued.

Richard Wagner composed *Trauermusik* (his title for the work) for a torch-lit procession from the train station to Weber's burial site, the Catholic Cemetery in Friedrichstadt. The subtitle of the work, "Funeral Music on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber" is misleading. This actually is not original music by Wagner. It is, in fact, one of the first band transcriptions! (and for "marching band") *Trauermusik* is actually Wagner's band version of excerpts from Weber's *Euryanthe*.

The first part of *Trauermusik* is taken from the overture to *Euryanthe* (mm.129-143). Wagner transposed it down to Bb minor and added the dominant seventh chord to connect sections. Wagner also changed the marking of "Largo" to "Adagio".

The main section of *Trauermusik* (mm.17-71) is taken from the cavatina "Hier dicht am Quell" (Near to this spring) from Act III. Wagner's choice of this passage might have been because of the many references to death that occur in the opera. Wagner also transposed the music from G major to Bb major. Wagner also altered repeated notes which occur in the closing trumpet fanfare in the opera. He added a repeat since the processional from the train station to the cemetery was two and one-half miles!

The coda of *Trauermusik* is taken from Act III also, scene 7. Wagner probably chose this passage to give the composition some formal structure, as this music is a variation of the material the opens the work.

From 1844 to 1926, the only known copies of the full score was the original and copy in the hand of Felix Mottl. Due to the scarcity of parts, only one known performance of the work occurred between the premiere and 1926; 82 years!

A piano arrangement published in 1860 by C. F. Meser gave the work its title known by most musicians, *Trauersinfonie*. Ironically, this is the only version of the work published during Wagner's lifetime. Wagner did not approve this version. It was not until 1926 that a published version appeared with several alterations from Wagner's original manuscript. However, the score appears with original instrumentation from 1844 and did not reflect the evolution of wind and brass instruments.

In 1948, at the request of Richard Franko Goldman, famed transcriber/arranger Erik Leidzen penned a version for “modern” instrumentation. His aim was to produce a useful version of the piece for American symphonic bands, rather than create a definitive performance edition of the original. Therefore, it is assumed that he used the 1926 published version as his guide, and not the original manuscript.