

The film RICHARD WAGNER, made on the occasion of the composer's 100th birthday in 1913 when cinema was still in its infancy, brings us the first comprehensive portrait of the "great master".

At the time, Wagner's original compositions could not be used for the film for reasons of copyright. Giuseppe Becce, who played Wagner in the film owing to a strong physical resemblance, suggested composing music that would create a clear link to Richard Wagner's work while maintaining enough difference to prevent legal consequences.

In his score to the film RICHARD WAGNER, Giuseppe Becce introduces music by Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven and Gioachino Rossini. However, the music is not employed as background or source music. Contrary to the producers' intentions, Becce does not aim to compile an arty potpourri of well-known works. Instead, he adapts a dramaturgical approach, editing the music and using agogic distortion as well as employing musical symbols almost as leitmotifs to interlink the scenes. Giuseppe Becce's music for this film formed the basis for his later work as a film composer and author of "Kinothek" and the standard work "Allgemeines Handbuch der Filmmusik" (General Film Music Manual).

The film inspired a slew of cinematic Wagner receptions that are still cross-fertilizing the presentation of Wagner's work on stage today. Although the glorified portrayal of Wagner's life and the elaborate decor of the film were criticised at the time of the premiere, the film, which was shot at many original locations, is now considered as a highly valuable historical document.

RICHARD WAGNER

On the occasion of Richard Wagner's 200th birthday, the film – now 100 years old – will be shown in a reconstructed, tinted version as a 35mm film copy. For the occasion, ZDF/ARTE are producing the film for TV and as a DVD, including a new orchestral version of Giuseppe Becce's music produced by the composer Bernd Schultheis. The latter is re-adapting the music in consideration of Becce's cinematic-dramaturgical creation. Although today, over 75 years after the death of the composer, there are no legal objections against the use of Wagner's music, the film will be accompanied by the music as created by Giuseppe Becce. Accordingly, the new orchestral version will be more than a mere compilation of traditional music in the original version. In scenes where the music follows a dramaturgical outline, the instrumentation will sometimes deviate from the original score to meet the requirements of the film and the perspective of modern audiences. As a result, a mild sense of alienation arises as used frequently by Dimitri Shostakovich to facilitate serious reflection which should not, however, lead to contrasts with the supposed original.

The film depicts the life and work of the great German composer Richard Wagner. It portrays some important steps in his career, such as when he proves himself able to assist his professor already as a young apprentice and, his first job as a bandmaster in Lauchstaedt – which he accepts foremost because he has fallen in love with a local actress. The film illustrates Wagner's time in Dresden, where he had his first successes and became the royal bandmaster even while DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER (THE FLYING DUTCHMAN) and TANNHÄUSER are booed by the audience.

The film reveals the unsteady nature of Wagner's career. He was both highly celebrated and heavily criticised, involved in aristocratic intrigues and misused by politicians until he found finally a loyal patronizer in King Ludwig II of Bavaria.



Director: Carl Froelich
(D, 1913)
Music: Giuseppe Becce,
reconstructed by Bernd Schultheis (2013)

Instrumentation:
2+1/pic.2+1/ca.1+1/piccl+1/
bcl.2+1/cbsn –
4/Wagnertb.3.3.1 –
timp.2perc – pno – 2hp –
strings
90 min.



A production commissioned
by ZDF/ARTE.