

## EXCERPTS FROM "DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG"

German text by Richard Wagner

English translation and commentary by Marc Mandel, copyright ©2004

### From ACT I

#### Prelude to Act I and Opening Chorale

The *Meistersinger* Overture (as it was called by Wagner until he wrote out the full score) is based upon a succession of musical ideas from the opera set out within the context of a self-contained musical structure, beginning with a sturdy C major theme associated with the guild of the Mastersingers, and continuing, after a segment anticipating Walther von Stolzing's prize-song, with the Mastersingers' festive processional, which is extensively developed. The music winds down into a relaxed statement of the prize-song and then leads to a compressed version, for winds, in shorter note-values, of the opening theme of the Mastersingers' guild. In this form the music represents the Masters' apprentices; against this is juxtaposed a staccato string figure connected in the opera with the spectators at the third-act Contest of Song. An imposing reappearance of the "guild theme" leads to the return of the opening material, but with a difference: in a magical moment signaled by the first triangle stroke in the piece, the three principal themes—those of the guild, the prize-song, and the Mastersingers' processional—are brought together contrapuntally in a musical texture of crystalline clarity and Mozartian balance. The overture leads without pause into the first scene of Act I, where a service in St. Catherine's Church is concluding with a chorale relevant to the next day's Feast of St. John the Baptist.

#### CONGREGATION

Da zu dir der Heiland kam,  
willig deine Taufe nahm,  
eihte sich dem Opfertod,  
gab er uns des Heils Gebot:  
dass wir durch sein' Tauf' uns  
weih'n,  
seines Opfers wert zu sein.  
Edler Täufer!  
Christ's Vorläufer!  
Nimm uns gnädig an,  
Dort am Fluss Jordan!

When, to you, the Savior came,  
willingly accepted your baptism,  
and offered himself as a sacrifice,  
He gave us holy salvation,  
that we be consecrated through  
His baptism,  
to be worthy of His sacrifice.  
Noble baptizer!  
Christ's precursor!  
Receive us mercifully  
there, at the River Jordan.

### From ACT II

#### Prelude to Act II and Apprentices' Chorus

The apprentices gaily look forward to the Feast of St. John even as they chide David, who is hoping to improve his chance of becoming a Mastersinger (by earning "the flowery garland of fine silk") and ignoring Magdalene, who is trying to find out how things went with Walther at the latter's preliminary singing trial, and then withholds from David his basket of food when she blames him for Walther's failure.

#### APPRENTICES

Johannistag! Johannistag!  
Blumen und Bänder so viel man mag!

St. John's Day! St. John's Day!  
Flowers and ribbons galore!

#### DAVID

("Das Blumenkränzlein aus Seiden fein,  
möcht' es mir balde beschieden sein!")

("The flowery garland of fine silk:  
might I soon earn it!")

## MAGDALENE

Bst! David!

Psst! David!

## DAVID

Ruft ihr schon wieder?  
Sing allein eure dummen Lieder!

You're calling me again?  
Sing your dumb songs alone!

## APPRENTICES

David, was soll's?  
Wär'st nicht so stolz,  
schau'st besser um,  
wär'st nicht so dumm!  
"Johannistag! Johannistag!"  
Wie der nur die Jungfer Lene nicht  
kennen mag!

David, what's with you?  
If you weren't so proud  
you'd see better—  
if you weren't so foolish!  
"St. John's Day! St. John's Day!"  
He cares not to know Lady Lene!

## MAGDALENE

Hand von der Taschen!  
Nichts zu naschen!—  
Hilf Gott! Unser Junker vertan!

Hands off the basket!  
There'll be no noshing!  
Good God! Our noble Walther undone!

## APPRENTICES

Heil, Heil zur Eh' dem jungen Mann!  
  
Wie glücklich hat er gefreit!  
Wir hörten's all', und sahen's an:  
der er sein Herz geweiht,  
für die er lässt sein Leben,  
die hat ihm den Korb nicht gegeben.

Hail! Hail the young man on his  
marriage!  
How happily he has wooed!  
We heard and saw it all:  
the one whom he's given his heart,  
for whom he'd give his life,  
won't give him his basket [of food].

## DAVID

Was steht ihr hier faul?  
Gleich haltet das Maul!

Stop hanging about!  
Shut your traps!

## APPRENTICES

Johannistag! Johannistag!  
Da freit ein jeder wie er mag.  
Der Meister freit!  
Der Bursche freit!  
Da gibt's Geschlamb' und Geschlumbfer!  
Der Alte freit  
Die junge Maid,  
der Bursche die alte Jumbfer!—  
Juchhei! Juchhei! Johannistag!

St. John's Day! St. John's Day!  
Each one woos as best he may.  
The Master woos!  
The young man woos!  
So much carrying on!  
The old man woos  
the young girl,  
the young man [woos] the old maid!  
Hooray! Hooray! It's St. John's Day!

## Sachs's monologue ("Was duftet doch der Flieder")

Sitting at his workbench late that night, outside his shop, Sachs reflects on the song of Walther's that so confounded those present when the young knight sought candidacy in the Masters' guild earlier that day. (Strains from Walther's song are audible in the orchestral fabric.) Sachs compares Walther to someone inspired by birdsong

but not really capable of recreating that song himself. Sachs also acknowledges that, whatever the others may have thought, he himself was quite taken with what he heard.

### SACHS

Was duftet doch der Flieder  
So mild, so stark und voll!  
Mir löst es weich die Glieder,  
will, dass ich was sagen soll.—  
Was gilt's, was ich dir sagen kann?  
Bin gar ein arm einfältig' Mann!  
Soll mir die Arbeit nicht schmecken,  
gäb'st, Freund, lieber mich frei:  
tät' besser das Leder zu strecken,  
und liess' alle Poeterei!—

Und doch, 's will halt nicht geh'n.—  
Ich fühl's— und kann's nicht versteh'n—  
kann's nicht behalten,— doch auch  
nicht vergessen;  
und fass' ich es ganz,— kann ich's  
nicht messen.—

Doch wie wollt' ich auch fassen  
was unermesslich mir schien?  
Kein' Regel wollte da passen,  
und war doch kein Fehler drin.—  
Es klang so alt, und war doch so neu,—  
wie Vogelsang im süßen Mai:—  
wer ihn hört,  
und wahnbetört  
sänge dem Vogel nach,  
dem brächt' es Spott und Schmach.—  
Lenzes Gebot,  
die süsse Not,  
die legt' es ihm in die Brust:  
nun sang er, wie er musst'!  
Und wie er musst', so konnt' er's;  
das merkt' ich ganz besonders.  
Dem Vogel, der heut' sang,  
dem war der Schnabel hold gewachsen;  
macht' er den Meistern bang,  
gar wohl gefiel er doch Hans Sachsen.

How fragrant is the elder-tree:  
so mild, so strong and full!  
It relaxes my limbs so gently,  
and wants me to say something...  
But to what purpose; what could I say?  
I'm just a poor, simple man!  
Were work not pleasing to me,  
you'd do better, friend, to leave me be:  
better for me to sew leather,  
and forget about poetry!

And yet, it won't leave me...  
I feel it...but can't understand it...  
can't grasp it...yet can't forget it;  
and if I grasp it...I can't parse it...

Yet how should I manage to grasp  
what seems to me not measurable?  
No rule seemed to suit it,  
yet there was no real fault...  
it sounded so old, and was yet so new...  
like birdsong, in sweet May:  
he who hears it  
and, gripped by delusion,  
might attempt what the bird has sung,  
brings on himself ridicule and disgrace...  
Spring's command,  
sweet necessity,  
set it in his heart...  
thus he sang as he had to!  
And as he had to, so he was able;  
that struck me quite clearly.  
The bird that sang today  
had a beak well-formed for it;  
he may have made the Masters anxious,  
but no question: Hans Sachs liked it.

### From ACT III

#### Prelude to Act III and Sachs's monologue ("Wahn! Wahn! Überall Wahn!")

The third-act Prelude anticipates Hans Sachs' musings, later in that same act, on the events that have transpired thus far. As the late Boston University professor John Daverio once wrote in these pages: "Not easily translatable in a single word, 'Wahn' is both the destructive illusion that can bring on disorder and confusion, and the productive illusion necessary for the creation of lasting works of art." Recognizing that he himself (the man who "heeds not his own advice") has been a participant in the confused, sometimes crazed proceedings of the past day, Sachs now resolves to turn the tide of activities from disorder and confusion to something more noble and artful—i.e., something that would not be possible without at least a touch of madness.

## SACHS

Wahn! Wahn!  
 Überall Wahn!  
 Wohin ich forschend blick'  
 in Stadt- und Welt-Chronik,  
 den Grund mir aufzufinden,  
 warum gar bis auf's Blut  
 die Leut' sich quälen und schinden  
 in unnütz toller Wut!  
 Hat keiner Lohn noch Dank davon:  
 in Flucht geschlagen  
 wähnt er zu jagen.  
 Hört nicht sein eigen Schmerz-  
   Gekreisch,  
 wenn er sich wühlt ins eig'ne Fleisch  
 wähnt Lust sich zu erzeigen!  
 Wer gibt den Namen an?  
 's ist halt der alte Wahn,  
 ohn' den nichts mag geschehen,  
 's mag gehen oder stehen!  
 Steht's wo im Lauf,  
 er schläft nur neue Kraft sich an;  
 gleich wacht er auf,  
 dann schaut, wer ihm bemeistern kann!—  
 Wie friedsam treuer Sitten,  
 Getrost in Tat und Werk,  
 Liegt nicht in Deutschlands Mitten,  
 Mein liebes Nürenberg!  
  
 Doch einer Abends spat  
 ein Unglück zu verhüten  
 bei jugendheissen Gemüthen,  
 ein Mann weiss sich nicht Rat;  
 ein Schuster in seinem Laden  
 zieht an des Wahnes Faden:  
 wie bald auf Gassen und Strassen  
 fängt der da an zu rasen;  
 Mann, Weib, Gesell und Kind,  
 fällt sich da an wie toll und blind;  
 und will's der Wahn gesegnen,  
 nun muss es Prügel regnen,  
 mit Hieben, Stoss' und Dreschen  
 den Wutesbrand zu löschen.—  
 Gott weiss, wie das geschah?—  
 Ein Kobold half wohl da!  
 Ein Glühworm fand sein Weibchen  
   nicht;  
 Der hat den Schaden angericht't.—  
 Der Flieder war's:—Johannis-Nacht.  
 Nun aber kam Johannis-Tag:—  
 Jetzt schau'n wir, wie Hans Sachs es  
   macht,  
 dass er den Wahn fein lenken kann,  
 ein edler Werk zu tun;

Delusion!  
 Delusion everywhere—  
 wherever I investigate  
 city and world chronicles,  
 in order to seek the reason  
 why, to the point of blood,  
 people torment and flay each other  
 in useless, senseless rage!  
 There's no reward or thanks in it:  
 driven to flight,  
 he imagines he's hunting.  
 He doesn't hear his own shrieks of pain,

as he digs into his own flesh:  
 he imagines there's pleasure in it.  
 Who'll give it a name?  
 It's but the old madness,  
 without which nothing can happen,  
 whether going or staying!  
 Should it stop in its course,  
 it sleeps only to restrengthen itself.  
 Then, when it wakes up,  
 just see who can tame it!  
 No longer, now, in Germany's midst,  
 does my dear Nuremberg  
 sit peacefully, true to custom,  
 confident in deed and work.

Yet, of an evening late,  
 to guard against a misfortune  
 of youthful hot-bloodedness,  
 a man heeds not his own advice;  
 a cobbler in his shop  
 pulls on the thread of madness:  
 how soon in the alleys and streets  
 madness starts to rage.  
 Man, woman, youth, and child  
 set upon each other, as if mad and blind;  
 and, if madness wants to bless it,  
 now it must rain blows,  
 with slashes, shoves, and thrashing  
 to quench the torch of fury.  
 God knows: how did it happen?  
 A goblin must have helped!  
 A glow-worm failed to find its wife,

and therefore caused the damage.  
 It was the elder-tree: St. John's Night.  
 But now has come—St. John's Day.  
 Now let's see what Hans Sachs can do

to guide this madness, artfully,  
 to make some nobler work;

denn lässt er uns nicht ruh'n,  
selbst hier in Nürnberg,  
so sei's um solche Werk,  
die selten vor gemeinen Dingen,  
und nie ohn' ein'gen Wahn gelingen.

for if it can't leave us in peace,  
even here in Nuremberg,  
then let it serve such work  
that's rare in commonplace things,  
and never succeeds without some  
bit of madness.

### Entrance of the Guilds, Apprentices, and Mastersingers

At the start of the final scene, set on the meadow outside Nuremberg, all gather to witness the Contest of Song, including the Shoemakers', Tailors', and Bakers' guilds, the apprentices, the townsfolk, and, finally, the Mastersingers themselves, who arrive to their theme music introduced much earlier, in the opera's overture.

#### THE SHOEMAKERS

Sankt Crispin, lobet ihn!  
War gar ein heilig Mann,  
zeigt' was ein Schuster kann.  
Die Armen hatten gute Zeit,  
macht' ihnen warme Schuh',  
und wenn ihm Keiner's Leder leiht,  
so stahl er sich's dazu.  
Der Schuster hat ein weit Gewissen,  
macht Schuhe selbst mit Hindernissen;  
und ist vom Gerber das Fell erst weg,  
dann streck'! streck'! streck'!  
Leder taugt nur am rechten Fleck.

Saint Crispin: praise him!  
He—indeed a holy man—  
showed what a shoemaker can do.  
The poor had a good time;  
he made them warm shoes,  
and when no one lent him leather,  
he stole it for the purpose.  
The shoemaker has a broad conscience,  
makes shoes despite impediments,  
and once the skin has left the tanner,  
then stretch! stretch! stretch!  
Leather serves only the right purpose.

#### THE TAILORS

Als Nürnberg belagert war,  
und Hungersnot sich fand,  
wär' Stadt und Land verdorben gar,  
  
war nicht ein Schneider zur Hand,  
der viel Mut hatt' und Verstand:  
hat sich in ein Bocksfell eingenäht,  
auf dem Stadtwall da spazieren geht,  
und macht wohl seine Sprünge  
gar lustig gutter Dinge.  
Der Feind, der sieht's und zieht vom  
Fleck:  
Der Teufel hol' die Stadt sich weg,  
Hat's drin noch so lustige Meck-meck-  
meck!  
Meck! Meck! Meck!  
Wer glaubt's, dass ein Schneider im  
Bocke steck'!

When Nuremberg was under siege,  
and beset by famine,  
the city and land would have been  
undone  
had there not been a tailor  
with much courage and understanding:  
he sewed himself into a goatskin,  
then walked along the city wall  
and gamboled about  
quite cheerfully.  
The enemy sees this, and pulls back:  
  
let the devil have the city  
if such merry bleaters be within.  
  
Meck! Meck! Meck!  
Who'd believe there was a tailor inside  
the goat!

#### THE BAKERS

Hungersnot! Hungersnot!  
Das ist ein gräulich Leiden!  
Gäb' euch der Bäcker nicht täglich Brot,  
müsst' alle Welt verschneiden.  
Beck! Beck! Beck!

Famine! Famine!  
What grizzly suffering it brings!  
Were there no baker for daily bread,  
the whole world would perish!  
Bake! Bake! Bake!

Täglich auf dem Fleck!	Daily, to the purpose!
Nimm uns den Hunger weg!	Relieve our hunger!
Nimm uns den Hunger weg!	Take our hunger away!

#### SHOEMAKERS

Streck! Streck! Streck!	Stretch! Stretch! Stretch!
Leder taugt nur am rechten Fleck!	Leather serves only the right purpose!

#### TAILORS

Me-e-e-e-ck! Me-e-e-e-ck!	Meck! Meck! Meck!
Me-e-e-e-ck!	
Wer meint, dass ein Schneider im Bocke steck'!	Who'd think there was a tailor inside the goat?

#### APPRENTICES (*as a group of young girls arrives*)

Herr Je! Herr Je! Mäd'el von Fürth!	Hooray! Hooray! Girls from Fürth!
Stadtpfeifer, spielt! dass 's lustig wird!	Town pipers, play! Make it merry!

#### DAVID (*to the other Apprentices*)

Ihr tanzt? Was werden die Meister sagen?	You're dancing? What would the Masters say?
Hört nicht?—Lass' ich mir's auch behagen!	Not listening? Then I'll have fun too!

#### SOME OF THE APPRENTICES

David! David! die Lene sieht zu!	David! David! Lene's watching!
die Lene sieht zu!	Lene's watching!

#### DAVID

Ach! lasst mich mit euren Possen in Ruh'!	Jeez! Leave me in peace from your jokes!
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#### JOURNEYMEN

Die Meistersinger!	The Mastersingers!
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#### APPRENTICES

Die Meistersinger!	The Mastersingers!
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#### DAVID (*cutting short his dance*)

Herr Gott!—Ade, ihr hübschen Dinger!	Good God! Farewell, you pretty things!
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*(The Meistersingers take their place on the platform.)*

#### APPRENTICES

Silentium! Silentium!	Be silent! Be silent!
Macht kein Reden und kein Gesumm'.	Don't make a sound!

*(As Sachs steps forward, all join in hailing him with a chorale sung to words  
by the original 16th-century figure of Hans Sachs.)*

#### EVERYONE

Ha! Sachs! 's ist Sachs!	Ha! Sachs! It's Sachs!
Seht! Meister Sachs! Meister Sachs!	See! Master Sachs! Master Sachs!
Stimmt an! Stimmt an!	Let's start! Let's start!

“Wach’ auf, es nahet gen den Tag,  
ich hör’ singen im grünen Hag  
ein’ wonnigliche Nachtigal,  
ihr’ Stimm durchdringet Berg und Tal:

die Nacht neigt sich zum Occident,  
der Tag geht auf vom Orient,  
die rotbrünstige Morgenröt’  
her durch die trüben Wolken geht.”—  
Heil! Heil! Heil!  
Nürnberg’s teurem Sachs!  
Heil dir, Nürnberg’s Sachs! Heil dir, *etc.*

“Awaken! The day draws near,  
I hear, singing in the green grove,  
a blissful nightingale,  
its voice rings through mountain and  
valley:

the night sinks into the west,  
the day rises in the east,  
the glowing red of morning  
breaks through the dreary clouds.”  
Hail! Hail! Hail!  
Nuremberg’s cherished Sachs!  
Hail to you, Nuremberg’s Sachs! Hail! *etc.*

End of the opera (from Sachs’s “Verachtet mir die Meister nicht”)

Walther has won the Contest of Song but refused the title of “Master.” Sachs responds, to music that rings down the final curtain with a still more substantial return of material from the opera’s overture.

HANS SACHS

Verachtet mir die Meister nicht,  
und ehrt mir ihre Kunst!  
Was ihnen hoch zum Lobe spricht,  
fiel reichlich euch zur Gunst.  
Nicht euren Ahnen, noch so wert,  
nicht eurem Wappen, Speer, noch  
Schwert,

Don’t ever scorn the “Master” name!  
Honor their art!  
What speaks highly to their praise  
has fallen abundantly to your advantage.  
Not to your ancestors, however worthy,  
nor to your escutcheon, spear, or sword,

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dass ihr ein Dichter seid,  
ein Meister euch gefreit,  
dem dankt ihr heut' eu'r höchstes  
Glück.

D'rum, denkt mit Dank ihr d'ran zurück,  
wie kann die Kunst wohl unwert sein,  
die solche Preise schliesset ein?—  
Dass uns're Meister sie gepflegt,  
g'rad' recht nach ihrer Art,  
nach ihrem Sinne treu gehegt,  
das hat sie echt bewahrt:  
blieb sie nicht ad'lig, wie zur Zeit,  
wo Höf' und Fürsten sie geweiht,  
im Drang der schlimmen Jahr'  
blieb sie doch deutsch und wahr;  
und wär' sie anders nicht geglückt,  
als wie wo alles drängt und drückt,  
ihr seht, wie hoch sie blieb in Ehr'!  
Was wollt ihr von den Meistern mehr?

Habt Acht! Uns dräuen üble Streich':—  
zerfällt erst deutsches Volk und Reich,

in falscher wälscher Majestät  
kein Fürst bald mehr sein Volk versteht;

und wälschen Dunst mit wälschem Tand  
sie pflanzen uns in deutsches Land;  
was deutsch und echt wüsst' keiner  
mehr,  
lebt's nicht in deutscher Meister Ehr'.

D'rum sag' ich euch:  
ehrt eure deutschen Meister,  
dann bannt ihr gute Geister!  
Und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst,  
zerging' in Dunst  
das heil'ge röm'sche Reich,  
uns bleibe gleich  
die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!

#### TOWNSFOLK

Ehrt eure deutschen Meister,  
dann bannt ihr gute Geister!  
Und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst,  
zerging' in Dunst  
das heil'ge röm'sche Reich,  
uns bleibe gleich  
die heil'ge deutsche Kunst! *etc.*  
Heil! Sachs!  
Nürnberg's teurem Sachs!

but that you are a poet,  
admitted by a Master—  
today, to that, you owe your highest  
fortune.

Therefore, think back with thanks:  
for how could such art be unworthy  
in encompassing such a prize?  
That our Masters have tended it,  
just so, according to their art,  
sheltered it through their understanding,  
preserved it, keeping it pure:  
has it not remained noble, as of old,  
consecrated by courts and princes,  
even in the stress of bad times,  
still remaining German, and genuine;  
and whatever other failures  
may have stressed or strained it,  
you see how highly esteemed it remains!  
How could you wish more from the  
Masters?

Beware! Evil acts threaten us!  
Should the German people and  
kingdom  
crumble under false, foreign rule,  
soon no prince will understand his  
people;  
and foreign mists with foreign trifles  
will take root in German soil:  
what's German and genuine would be  
known no longer,  
if it lived not in the German Masters'  
honor.

Therefore I say to you:  
honor your German Masters;  
then you'll summon good spirits!  
And if you grant favor to their works,  
should even the Holy Roman Empire  
dissolve into mist,  
there would still remain, for us,  
the holy German art.

Honor your German Masters;  
then you'll summon good spirits!  
And if you grant favor to their works,  
should even the Holy Roman Empire  
dissolve into mist,  
there would still remain, for us,  
the holy German art. *etc.*  
Hail, Sachs!  
Nuremberg's cherished Sachs!

END OF THE OPERA