Wagner and Ideology

“ Daniel Barenboim & Edward Said in Conversation

The following is an edited conversation about Wagner that took place between my friend, Edward Saïd, and myself, at Columbia University, where Mr. Saïd is Professor of Comparative Literature and English. The conversation appears in full in the Spring 1998 issue of Raritan, a quarterly publication of Rutgers University.

***ES:** Wagner is a composer who, unlike almost any other composer, lends himself to conferences and discussions. And, of course, associated with the name of Wagner are a series of adjectives -there's Wagnerism, there's Wagnerian, there's a Wagnerite. What is it that causes this extraordinary interest and devotion to Wagner?*

DB: I think that the reasons are manifold. They stem from Wagner's musical personality; they stem from his personality outside music; they stern from the fact that he not only wrote music and the librettos to his own operas, but tri ed t o revolutionize opera and to create the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. We can't really talk about Beethoven and the consequences; we can only speak about Debussy and the consequences in a very limited sense. But when we discuss Wagner and the consequences, we have to ask, did he have any influence -and if so, what kind of influence – on the way people viewed the music that preceded him? Did he have any effect on the history of the development of interpretation of the great classics, Mozart, Beethoven, etc.? And what influence, if any, did he have on the music that came after him? On the purely musical side of the twentieth century?

I think that if you examine these questions carefully, and you examine his writings about music (especially his book on conducting, which I have found not only interesting, but very useful), you will find a number of influences on music and performance. First of all, Wagner had a great understanding of, or intuition for (or perhaps a combination of the two), acoustics. He was the first person to have that, I think, except perhaps Berlioz, and in a certain way Liszt, although Liszt was more limited to the piano. By acoustics I mean the presence of sound in a room, the concept of time and space. Wagner really developed that concept musically. Which means that a lot of his criticism of performances of his own time, conducted by Mendelssohn and other people, was directed at what he considered a very superficial kind of interpretation, namely, an interpretation that took no risks, that didn't go to the abyss, that tried, in other words, to find a golden path without having the extremes. Of course, this is an impossibility and can inevitably lead to superficiality. This also had an influence on the speed at which the music was performed, because if the content was poor, the speed had to be greater. Therefore Wagner complains bitterly about Mendelssohn's tempi.

How did he propose to fight that superficiality? In two ways. One, – with his developing the idea of a certain necessary flexibility of tempo, of certain imperceptible changes within the classical movements. (I'm talking now about

his ideas about Beethoven, not about his own music – I'll come to that later.) In other words, every sequence – every paragraph if you want to speak in literary terms – had its own melos and therefore required an imperceptible change of speed in order to be able to express the inherent content of that paragraph. All of these, of course, are concepts that are still being debated today. That these changes have to be imperceptible is evident, otherwise the form would break. But what Wagner really maintains is that unless you have the ability to guide the music in this way, you are not able to express all that is in it, and therefore you remain on the surface.

He was diametrically opposed to a metronomic way of interpreting music. He had this idea of *zeit und raum*, time and space. Obviously tempo is not an independent factor: in order to sustain a slower tempo, which Wagner considered necessary for certain movements (not everything had to be slow, only certain movements and certain passages), for instance, he considered it an absolute necessity to imperceptibly slow down the second subject in a classical symphony where the first subject was dramatic – masculine, or whatever you want to call it – and the second was a contrast to that. But in order to make the slightly slower speed not only workable, but to allow it to express the content of the paragraph and to keep it within the context of the movement, of course there has to be some tonal compensation. This is how he came to the concept of the continuity of sound: that sound tends to go to silence, unless it is sustained. From this came the whole concept not only of the color of sound – which is what so many people talk about today and which has led to (to my mind) superficial ideas about the "international sound of orchestras" – but of the weight of sound. And Wagner was more interested in the weight of the sound.

Of course, it was easier for him to deal with that concept then, because the minute you talk about weight you also talk about harmony. And since this was all pre-atonal music, the harmonic fundamental was much stronger than it is now. And therefore, tied to the gravity of the harmony, he was able to create more and more tension through the continuity of sound, and this imperceptible slowing down of the tempo went practically unnoticed. Then somehow at the end, in an

unnoticeable way, you came back. These two words, imperceptible and unnoticeable, are very important because this is the art of transition. What I'm trying to say by this is that, through these two concepts, Wagner influenced the way the whole world, without exception, looked at the music that had come before him, the classics, mostly German or middle or central European music – Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, etc. – without mentioning that of his contemporaries.

Therefore, until the Second World War, you couldn't ignore Wagner's ideas, whether you knew that they came from Wagner or not. They just became tradition. And whether the conductors were Furtwängler, Weingartner, Bruno Walter, or even, in a way, Toscanini, who obviously went absolutely against all these ideas, they could not refrain from occupying themselves with these principles. The same goes for the instrumentalists, not only for orchestras, but for people like Bülow and D'Albert. And this we know not from hearsay, nor even from the relative perfection or precision of recordings, but from the editions they made of the Beethoven sonatas, for instance. I've studied them very carefully, both the Bülow edition and the D'Albert edition, and you see all these principles of the slight modification of tempo, on through Schnabel, Edwin Fischer, Backhaus, etc. All this would have been unthinkable without Wagner's ideas. So, in this way, he influenced a whole history of interpretation of music. To the point that the reaction that came in this century – the sort of new objectivity, the "*die neue Sachlichkeit*" it was called in Germany, was an attempt to fight this. What we are experiencing now, in the last whatever number of years, with the revival of historical practices and playing of period instruments, is also, in fact – whether knowingly or not – a reaction against this Wagnerian concept of the continuity of sound. The principle of these instruments and this way of making music is precisely to articulate more and to be able to cut the sound and to cut the harmonic pressure of the music.

When he came to write his own music, he developed all these principles to the extreme. In fact, Wagner, to my mind, developed each expressive element, in sound production and musical expression, right to its extreme – like an elastic that

is stretched to its extreme. He created a form in the operas that did away with the separation of musical numbers, arias, etc. and with continuity. In other words, he continually worked with continuity. He developed harmony in a very, very personal way, and in many directions. One always talks in general about Wagnerian harmonies, but *Tristan und Isolde* is one world, *Die Meistersinger* is a completely different world, and to my mind *Parsifal* is yet another world.

***ES**: But even though Wagner's concepts of sound and transition – which are the essence of the music – had this extraordinary widespread influence, there are nevertheless quite different-sounding schools of Wagner conducting, Wagner interpretation….*

DB: The development of the interpretation of his own music – and this is pure intuition and feeling, I have no proof of this – I find is tied much more to the spirit of the time, to the *zeitgeist* and to the nonmusical ideas that preoccupied people. And you find, in a lot of the performances from the 1920s until after the Second World War, something which I find has much in common with Nazi monumentality, which is also evident in architecture and in the other arts. There is something bombastic, loud, uncouth, not very refined or subtle, in the colors and in the balance.

In fact, the first conscious preoccupation with the balance and with the strict adherence to the dynamics of the works came from people like Rudolf Kempf, who was to my mind a very underrated German conductor who had a great feeling for sound and for balance, and then, of course, Pierre Boulez in his by now famous Ring with Chéreau in 1976. I think that this is what demystified the musical aspect – I'm not talking now about the world of ideas. And, as in all other music, I find Furtwängler's interpretation of Wagner not only in a class of its own – this is a matter of taste – but on a path of its own, where even in the most obvious, open moments, like in the *Die Meistersinger* overture, there is an uncanny and unlimited strength in the search for understanding.

ES: *Do you think there is a tendency in Wagner's work – let's say in Tristan and even, to a degree, in Parsifal – to move towards not just the notion of flow and transition and becoming, but also a kind of indeterminacy which, in a certain sense, prepares one for atonality?*

DB: I don't think so. I think that Wagner knew exactly what he wanted, and what effect what he wrote would produce, and I don't mean effect in the superficial, banal way, but in the deepest sense. Maybe part of his mistake is that he tried, in a slightly over-Teutonic way, to systemize something that has to do more with the realm of feeling in music: that absolutely necessary relationship between manipulation and yielding, which to me is the basis of all music-making, in fact, of human existence. So when he leads us into a blurred, indefinite area, I think then he is manipulating. I think he knows perfectly well what he is doing...

ES: *You're a conductor who lives in Wagner, in a sense; you play him, you think about him; where do you feel the limits of your freedom are with Wagner? In other words, do you feel that you can, as Toscanini did, double parts that are not written that way, or add and subtract from what is given? Or do you feel that you are guided by a literal approach to the text, where perhaps the thing is the balance between what you think of as the spirit of the work versus the literal manifestation of the work on a piece of paper, which is the score, after all. The third element, of course, is tradition. Tradition could just be the last bad performance that was done, but it also means that you've obviously benefited from what you've listened to, and you are in a line with a number of conductors, which is an element, too, in the interpretation.*

DB: I think that when one speaks about a literal understanding of a work of music, one has to be very specific about it, because nowadays when one talks about music performance, one talks mostly about tempo. Is he free? In other words, does he take liberties with the tempo or does he play like a metronome? I'm oversimplifying it, obviously, for the sake of the clarity of the argument. But I think that, in a way, so many concepts have become superficial through overuse. They are blurred. Literal to me means that you do what is written, but you do all of what is written, not only the part that is easy to judge. In other words, if there

is a phrase that is very difficult, almost impossible, to play legato, that has no break in it, that is seamless and has a tremendous intensity, and you do not play it that way, that for me is not literal. In other words, literal has to be adjusted from the line of least resistance to the line of most resistance. In music-making, the only line that is valuable is the line of most resistance. Therefore, when you talk about literalness, you have to talk about changing text orchestration; you have to talk about tempo; you have to talk about dynamics; you have to talk about balance; and you have to talk about the length of the notes. The only work of Wagner where we know that he wanted to make alterations in the orchestration is The Ring for the simple reason that The Ring, although it was first performed in complete form in Bayreuth, was not written for the house in Bayreuth. The only work of Wagner that was written for that house was Parsifal. And Wagner himself, who was present at all the rehearsals of Parsifal, learned from the accoustical experience and had in mind to make slight changes in the orchestration of the Ring.

ES: *For Bayreuth.*

DB: Yes. I think other than that Wagner's mastery of instrumentation – and of the varying levels of volume and density of sound that are created by the different instruments of the orchestra – is so masterly that there is no need to even think about changing it. There is always something that has to be done to the sound so that it does produce the necessary effect as it is written.

ES: *That's true principally of the works performed in Bayreuth. If you were to perform, let's say, The Ring in Bayreuth, as you have, or Tristan, or Parsifal, then a different set of practices obtains.*

DB: I have conducted *Tristan* for many, many years in Bayreuth. I have also conducted *Tristan* with an open pit. I have conducted the second act of *Tristan*, often in concert form. I've conducted *Parsifal* and *Walküre* and *Siegfried*, also in an open pit at the State Opera in Berlin. So I have had the opportunity to compare

the two. I think the main difference, of course, is the balance between orchestra and stage: in Bayreuth, you can really play the loud passages full out, which you cannot do in an open pit.

ES: *Can you describe what it's like to play in Bayreuth as opposed to somewhere else?*

DB: As you know, the pit in Bayreuth is mostly covered, and it goes down in steps, so that you do not get, as you do in an open pit, the sound directly from the pit to the audience. And therefore you, as a listener, do not have to mix it with the sound that you get from the singers on the stage. You get it already mixed, and this is why it is often so mellow, so round, and so creamy. The pit itself, acoustically speaking, is very resonant; it has a tendency to be too loud, and therefore the reaction when you first start playing there is to try and play too softly, because you think it's too loud, and it takes some time to get used to it. I would compare the pit at Bayreuth to deep-sea diving. When you are underwater and you have a problem with your equipment, you can really use only your brain and some movements to get out of the difficulty and to climb to the surface. You don't get anywhere with aggression, with elbow-pushing, because the water is much too strong. And, in a way, the Bayreuth pit is like this, too. The moment there is slight difficulty with the precision, there is no point in trying to beat angularly in the hope that everybody will count to that, because it doesn't happen. It's a question of giving an idea of when the next important moment is coming, and then everybody assembles. In other words, it is a question of not going to the musician or the section in question and beating angularly in his eyes, but rather of bringing him to you. And all kinds of round movements can help you do that.

DB: Yes. And in fact the conductors who have had difficulties acoustically in the pit at Bayreuth have been conductors who have a very angular way of conducting. Wagner had a preoccupation with everything that was round, and I think this is part of his whole personality: he hated anything that was angular or clearly defined.

The main difference between conducting in the pit at Bayreuth and at the State Opera pit in Berlin is that, at the State Opera, you have to start all the crescendos a little later than you would in an open pit, because otherwise you get too loud too soon; and you must come down with the diminuendos obviously a little quicker, and you cannot sustain loud chords in the brass as long as you can in Bayreuth. At first sight, this might seem like a thinning out of the musical material, but it doesn't necessarily have to be like that. Because, on the other hand, you get an orchestral presence; you get an active participation from the orchestra in an open pit, which you cannot get in Bayreuth. In a work like *Parsifal*, it makes no difference. On the contrary: I think that anybody who conducts *Parsifal* and has not conducted it in Bayreuth has not conducted *Parsifal*. It was written for that acoustic, for that place, and it needs to be done there. But even in *The Ring*, I think that you have to be very open and see that there are advantages and disadvantages in both.

ES: *Bayreuth is obviously a place you like to conduct in.*

DB: Oh, for these works it is absolutely a necessity. It is another level.

ES: *Now to move from Bayreuth the place to Bayreuth, the idea, or the ideology. There is a lot of baggage involved in Wagner's operas. There is, as you said earlier, all the prose writing. And there is also the extremely problematic material of the dramas themselves. Obviously, sexuality is quite pronounced – and unprecedented before Wagner – in those works. Similarly, violence of one sort of another. But it's the combination that is special to Wagner, plus, of course, all of Wagner's writing from the beginning to the very end of his career, when he was concerned about a lot of the ideology having to do with German culture and the Jews and so forth in the period of Parsifal. You are dealing with a composer who is unique in that way, and this is obviously one of the aspects of Wagner that is problematic. The other, of course, is the association of Wagner and Bayreuth with the Nazi period and the use made of Wagner during the Nazi period.*

The thing that you can obviously inform us about and illuminate is: What is it like as a conductor to face all of these issues in the productions that you deal with? To what extent is there a kind of interplay or even an antagonism? In many respects, Wagner's work is really all about antitheses, contradictions.

DB: Within himself, too.

***ES**: Within himself, absolutely. I think it would be wrong from an interpretive point of view to mute them, and to say they're really not there, there's this quite serene, marvelous world that he's produced and gods and goddesses. That's nonsense. But the question is, given your background, what is it like to confront this – whether as somebody preparing or conducting a production or, as we are now, thinking about it?*

DB: I can't answer this briefly. A few things have to be made clear. First of all, there is Wagner the composer. Then there's Wagner the writer of his own librettos – in other words, everything that is tied to the music. Then there is Wagner the writer on artistic matters. And then there is Wagner the political writer – in this case, primarily the anti-Semitic political writer. These are four different aspects to his work.

But before discussing them, I think it is worth examining the history of production in Bayreuth. Bayreuth began, under Wagner, as a great experimental theater. The whole world attended the world premiere of *The Ring* in 1876. Wagner also had, for his time, absolutely the most revolutionary and progressive ideas. He was a man of such forceful talent that he also invented the notion of the covered pit, such as it was constructed in Bayreuth. The pit at Bayreuth has been accepted by all modern acousticians as absolutely perfect; not only that, but it is impossible to imitate – which shows you that his talents and his genius went far beyond composing music.

He started the theater in Bayreuth in 1876, but shortly afterwards, he had to close the theater because he didn't have any money. 1882 was the year of the world premiere of *Parsifal*. In 1883, he died. As is often the case with great artists, they

inspire either unrestrained adulation or uncontrolled hatred, and Wagner is a prime example of this. His widow, Cosima, and everybody who worked with him then, worked in an atmosphere of uncritical adulation and fought to preserve every little snippet of an idea that the master might have had. Which is the most un-Wagnerian thing you can do, because he was exactly the opposite of himself. He was a revolutionary; he rethought and redid and undid everything in order to create it anew. Therefore, this whole fight to retain the theater at Bayreuth as it had been under Wagner, to my mind, made Bayreuth devoid of one of the most important characteristics of Wagner the artist. Productions there stayed almost exactly the same, in fact, until the Second World War. *The Ring*, for example remained the same production from 1876 until at least the 1920s – that's nearly fifty years. Bayreuth was the most conservative, unthoughtful theater in the whole world. This was also caused, in the twenties, by the rise of German nationalism and the type of conductors who would agree to conduct at Bayreuth: Bruno Walter never conducted there; Klemperer didn't conduct there; Fritz Busch, who was not a Jew but felt morally very strongly about the way the Jews were being treated, would not conduct there. I'm talking about the *beginning* of the Nazi era if not before. Busch then left Germany in protest with the rest of his family, conducted once, and never came again, because he found the whole atmosphere intolerable. Even Hans Meyer, the great Wagner theorist who was there as a young man, recalls it as being absolutely intolerable.

So that conservatism stuck in the interpretation of the works. In other words, it was not in the *nature* of the works but in their *interpretation* at Bayreuth. In fact it went, as I've said before, against the innate character of the works. Emil Pretorius was there in the thirties; and with Furtwängler, there was some kind of new idea, but it basically remained the same. I think it is important to acknowledge that Bayreuth, from 1876 until the Second World War, was the most conservative, narrow-minded theater in the whole world.

When the festival was reopened in 1951 by Wagner's two grandsons, Wieland and Wolfgang, the whole idea of the new Bayreuth was developed. Wieland's idea was **that the music is written out and clearly defined, but the staging is not written**

out, and therefore has to be adapted to the aesthetic necessities of the times. And this is, of course, at the root of stage production and opera production. What really is expected? We have enough difficulty agreeing on what is literal musically when we have a written score in front of us, but what is literal in terms of staging? Wieland tried to make Bayreuth the most progressive place, in those terms, and he did. And in fact, since 1951, Bayreuth has become exactly the opposite of what it was before, a place where everything is re-thought, a place where all the productions are made to coincide with the ideas of the people who stage them – Wieland and then Wolfgang, and then people like Chéreau, Friedrich, Harry Kupfer, and now Heiner Mueller.

I came to Wagner relatively late – for me in any case. I started, as you know, very, very young, and I was playing professionally already at the age of seven, but the musical education that I got and the *ambiente* that I lived in revolved much more around piano, instrumental, symphonic, and chamber music. I went to hear song recitals; I went to hear string quartets; and I went to hear symphony orchestras; I rarely went to the opera. When I was nine, my family and I moved to Israel. The Israel Opera was rather poor in those days, but Wagner wasn't played in any case, so I had no real contact, I mean active contact, until I was nearly twenty years old.

***ES**: What was the first Wagner you saw, do you remember?*

DB: I think *Tristan*. So I came to Wagner first of all from a purely musical and orchestral point of view. And I became fascinated with the way every element can really be examined individually, and with the whole idea of orchestration and of the weight and continuity of sound. And I became very interested in Wagner through his writings about music, and conducting, etc. So this was the main thing that interested me first, and I did not occupy myself with the world of ideas at that stage. I must say, in those days I had no idea I would end up conducting operas. I was not even conducting the English Chamber Orchestra, let alone Bayreuth, so nothing was further from my mind. And I approached Wagner from the works that were closer to me, and that had an influence on Wagner as a musician: Beethoven first of all, then of course Berlioz and Liszt. And in a way, Bruckner, although he was not an influence on Wagner, but I was from early on

attached to the music of Bruckner. The study of Wagner's music was of great help to me, not only in eventually performing his own works, but in understanding many, many other styles of music. And that goes as far as Debussy – post-Wagner, too. I will never forget how it struck me the first time I conducted Debussy's *La Mer*, when I suddenly found the same combinations of instruments in unison – trumpet and English horn, or trumpet and oboe, as in the prelude to *Parsifal* – that only Wagner had used before him. In other words, the coloristic element of Wagner is also very important. In any case, this is what really fascinated me in his work and in his writings about music. And his writing on the Beethoven symphonies and on conducting in general had a great influence on my whole way of looking at his music and of playing it. Then, as I became more and more connected with the pieces, I started preparing to conduct the operas. And this was the first time that I occupied myself with Wagner's writing on the subjects other than the music itself – i.e. the texts that Wagner wrote for his own operas and his ideological writings.

***ES**: What did you think about his views on the Jews and music, for example, that really are quite central to a lot of what he wrote? And subsequently, what did you think about the modern musicological and cultural interpretations of Wagner that stress or try to stress the extent to which some of those ideas that he discusses in the prose works are carried over into the operas? Interestingly, anti-Semitism and Wagner was not really a big topic until fairly recently, although Adorno pioneered it in his early book on Wagner. One of the things that he says there is of course that Mime and Beckmesser, to name two characters, are in fact caricatures of Jews, and that if you pay close attention to that strand in the work – I mean in the prose work – you can find it. Given the history of association between Wagner and National Socialism – and the horrendous results of that association, perhaps, in the Holocaust – there is a massive weight there that one has to deal with somehow, in looking at the work. You're a Jew, and I don't need to add that I'm a Palestinian, so it's an interesting...*

DB: We are both Semitic. So he was against both of us!

***ES**: Wagner and the Jews. It's a question that, in a certain sense, can't be avoided. If I might just add one other thing and that is that in his operas Wagner uses Jewish caricatures to represent characters who themselves are not Jewish. For example, Mime is not Jewish in the work – he's not identified that way – and the same is true about Beckmesser – whereas in his prose works, Wagner does speak directly about Jews.*

DB: Well, I think it's obvious that Wagner's anti-Semitic views and writings are monstrous. There is no way around that. And I must say that if I, in a naïvely sentimental way, try to think which of the great composers of the past I would love to spend twenty-four hours with, if I could, Wagner doesn't come to mind. I'd love to follow Mozart around for twenty-four hours; I'm sure it would be very entertaining, amusing, edifying, but Wagner…

***ES**: You wouldn't invite him to dinner.*

DB: Wagner? I might invite him to dinner for study purposes, but not for enjoyment. Wagner, the person, is absolutely appalling, despicable, and, in a way, very difficult to put together with the music he wrote, which so often has exactly the opposite kind of feelings. It is noble, generous, etc. But now we are entering into the whole discussion of whether it is moral or not and this becomes too involved in a discussion. But suffice it to say for now that Wagner's anti-Semitism was monstrous. That he used a lot of, at the time, common terminology for what could be described as salon anti-Semitism, and that he had all sorts of rationalizations about it, does not make it any less monstrous. He also used some abominable phrases which can be, at best, interpreted as being said in the heat of the moment – that Jews should be burned, etc. Whether he meant these things figuratively or not can be discussed. The fact remains that he was a monstrous anti-Semite. How we would look at the monstrous anti-Semitism without the Nazis, I don't know. One thing I do know is that they, the Nazis, used, misused, and abused Wagner's ideas or thoughts – I think this has to be said – beyond what he might have had in mind. Anti-Semitism was not invented by Adolf Hitler and it was certainly not invented by Richard Wagner. It existed for generations and generations and centuries before. The difference between National Socialism and

the earlier forms of anti-Semitism is that the Nazis were the first, to my knowledge, to evolve a systematic plan to exterminate the Jews, the whole people. And I don't think, although Wagner's anti-Semitism is monstrous, that he can be made responsible for that, even though a lot of the Nazi thinkers, if you want to call them that, often quoted Wagner as their precursor. It also needs to be said for clarity's sake that, in the operas themselves, there is not one Jewish character. There is not one anti-Semitic remark. There is nothing in any one of the ten great operas of Wagner even remotely approaching a character like Shylock. That you can interpret Mime or Beckmesser in a certain anti-Semitic way (in the same way, you can also interpret *The Flying Dutchman* as the errant Jew), this is a question that speaks not about Wagner, but about our imagination and how our imagination is developed, coming into contact with those works.

***ES**: Yes, but it's more than that, Daniel. You can say that it's our imagination, but it's also known, I think, that Wagner drew on things available to him in his culture, images, which came from the standard language, ideas, and images, of anti-Semitic thought.*

DB: Judaism was a subject of parody, there is no question about that. It was a subject of parody, and I'm sure that in the privacy of Wagner's house in Wahnfried, he and Cosima very often imitated Mime with a Jewish accent and with Jewish mannerisms, etc.; I don't deny that for one moment. On the other hand, you have to say that Wagner was in that respect artistically very open and, I would say, courageous, too. If he'd really wanted to make the operas an artistic expression of his anti-Semitism, he would have called a spade a spade, and he didn't. In other words, that he ridiculed the Jews is absolutely clear, but I don't think that this is an inherent part of the works.

I think that Wagner's anti-Semitism is one thing, and the things that we have been forced to associate with his music are another. I would like to speak about the whole problem of Wagner in Israel, because I think it's linked to that. In 1936, Toscanini, who had been in Bayreuth, as you know, in 1930 and I think 31, refused to go back to Bayreuth because of the Nazis and I think because of Hitler's prisons in Bayreuth. He went instead to Tel Aviv where the then Palestine Philharmonic

Orchestra was founded by Bronislaw Huberman and conducted the first opening concerts of the orchestra. In the program, there was Brahms's Second Symphony, there were some Rossini overtures, and also the prelude to Act 1 and Act 3 of*Lohengrin.* Nobody had a word to say about it; nobody criticized him; the orchestra was very happy to play it. Wagner's anti-Semitism was as well known then as it is now, so therefore the whole problem of playing Wagner in Israel has nothing to do with his anti-Semitism. What actually happened after that was that, after Kristallnacht in November 1938, the orchestra, which is a collective group of musicians who govern themselves and run themselves to this day, decided that because of the association with the Nazi's use of Wagner's music and how it led to the burning of the books – they refused to play any more Wagner. This is all there is to it. Everything that has come since then has been the reaction of people from outside the orchestra, some in favor, some absolutely against.

Why am I telling you this? Because I think this shows very clearly that one has to distinguish between Wagner's anti-Semitism, which is monstrous and despicable and worse than the sort of normal, shall we say, accepted-unacceptable level of anti-Semitism, and the use the Nazis made of it. I have met people who absolutely cannot listen to Wagner. A lady who came to see me in Tel Aviv when the whole Wagner debate was taking place said, "How can you want to play that? I saw my family taken to the gas chambers to the sound of the *Meistersinger* overture. Why should I listen to that?" Simple answer: there is no reason why she should listen to it. I don't think that Wagner should be forced on anybody, and the fact that he has inspired such extreme feelings, both pro and con, since his death, doesn't mean to say that we don't have some civic obligations. Therefore, my suggestion at the time was that the orchestra, which was willing to play – and they were the musicians or rather the descendants of the musicians who had voted in 1938 to boycott, in other words they were redoing the vote and closing the circle – should not play it in a subscription concert where anybody who has been a loyal subscriber to the Israel Philharmonic for so many years would be forced to listen to something that they didn't want to listen to. But if somebody does not make these associations, especially since these associations do not stem from Wagner himself, he should be able to hear it. Therefore, my suggestion was that it should

be played in a non-subscription concert of the Israel Philharmonic where anybody who didn't want to hear it didn't have to do, and anybody who wanted to go had to go and buy a ticket for that specific concert. And the fact that this was not allowed to happen is a reflection of a kind of political abuse and of all sorts of ideas that again have nothing to do with Wagner's music. And this is really the chapter of Wagner and Judaism.

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