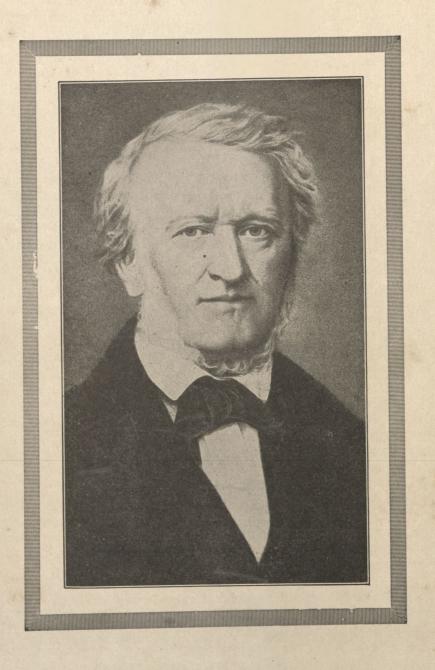
# MAGIC FIRE SCENE

\_\_\_BY\_\_\_

#### RICHARD WAGNER





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#### WAGNER'S "MAGIC FIRE SCENE"

FROM THE OPERA OF "VALKYRIE"
Paraphrase by Louis Brassin

RICHARD WAGNER. Born at Leipsic, Germany, 1813. Died at Venice, Italy, 1883.

LOUIS BRASSIN. Born at Aix-le-Chapelle, 1840. Died at St. Petersburg, 1884.

NE of the most distinguished names in the entire history of music, and much the most influential personage during the period from about 1850 to his death in 1883, and even until now, is that of Richard Wagner, the composer of the following operas: "Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes" (1842), "The Flying Dutchman" (1843), "Tannhaueser" (1844), "Lohengrin" (produced by Liszt at Weimar in 1850), "The Ring of the Nieblungs," consisting of four operas: "Rheingold" (1869), "The Valkyrie" (finished in 1855), "Siegfried" (finished in 1869), "The Twilight of the Gods" (finished only in time for the first complete performance of the four operas of the Ring, at Bayreuth, July, 1876), "Tristan and Isolde" (produced at Munich in 1865), "The Mastersingers of Nuremburg" (produced at Munich in 1868), "Parsifal" (produced at Bayreuth, 1882).

Wagner also published a succession of literary works, in which he discussed the proper relation of music to poetry, and of opera to stage performances ("Oper und Drama," etc.). These books and pamphlets of his attracted universal attention, and awakened realms of discussion throughout the musical world.

At the time when Wagner began to write, Italian opera, as represented by Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini, had quite gone back from the idea suggested long before by the reformer, Gluck, that opera should be at once a play (a visible "action" upon the stage), but with music suitable and helpful, yet not permitted at critical moments of the drama to interpose long arias with prodigious vocal running notes and display. As, for instance, a leading character is stabbed fatally, and falls fainting upon the stage. Yet the personage rises, begins and completes a long and very elaborate aria, and even repeats it a second time, only to go on with the dying after the recalls have been duly acknowledged. Opera was full of this kind of thing and the singers considered themselves and their personal art of singing to be the principal business of the opera, everything else being surroundings.

Against this ignoble conception of the music, by egotistical singers, Wagner held that the music should be coherent, very intimate in its correspondence with the dramatic situation at the moment where it occurs, and that elaborate pieces must not be permitted to interrupt the progress of the play. Towards this ideal he progressively worked.

Wagner was a remarkably original musician, having in particular a very keen sense for harmony, and an instinct for the emotional coloring which could be given by a succession of unusual chords. He also made great use of what he called "leading motives," or striking musical phrases, each one supposed to signify some personage or principal in the action, the motive appearing many times whenever its specific character or incident came up again for discussion. The fourth opera of the cycle of the "Ring" ("The Twilight of the Gods") carries this principle farther than it had ever been carried before.

The novel harmonies, the significant motives, the effulgent orchestral coloring (in which respect Wagner excelled all writers before him), and the lack of good places for applause, where a singer closes a song with a great climax, made the Wagner operas for a long time seem tedious to thoughtless operagoers. But gradually, especially in Germany first, where music is taken seriously, and very soon in America, where the richness and strength of Wagner's music made a profound impression, the Wagner operas have established themselves as dramatic musical works of astonishing power, and a lasting charm, due to the strength of mind put into them by the composer, and the heroic moods and situations musically represented in them. So that now all the world over, the Wagner operas form a very important part of every operatic season, Italy itself being the last country to fall into line.

In his closing years Wagner lived in Bayreuth, the capital of a province in Bavaria, where, by the help of Wagner societies all over the world, and of King Ludwig II., he finally erected a Stage-Festival Play-house (theatre) where he proposed to give great festivals every summer. The theatre was completed at a cost of nearly a half million dollars, and the first festival given in 1876, Wagner conducting the four operas of the "Ring." Wagner died in 1883, but the festivals have continued ever since; his widow, Mme. Cosima Wagner (daughter of Liszt), being ever since in control.

The dramatic texture of the Wagner operas is such that they afford few opportunities for taking out a choice bit and arranging it into a brilliant piano piece. Yet the pianoforte arrangements from his works are now very numerous, the best being several by Brassin, and four by Joseph Rubinstein (the very best), all enormously difficult. At the same time, while not at the first moment so attractive when taken out of their living appearance upon the stage, the pianoforte arrangements grow in appreciation, and become more and more attractive as we know them better. This is true of Liszt's arrangements from "Lohengrin," "Tannhaueser," etc., and of those above mentioned, among which is the present work.

THE TRANSCRIBER: Louis Brassin was described in Mendel's Conversation-Lexicon, in 1872, as "one of the most distinguished pianists of the present time. He was the oldest son of a celebrated baritone singer, and his mother appears to have been a sister of Drouet, the celebrated flute-player. With such a heredity it is no wonder that the boy Louis manifested his remarkable musical gifts at a very early age, as did his two brothers, one born in 1843, the other in 1844, and both of them becoming quite as celebrated as Louis himself. In his younger days he made long concert tours with his two brothers. When of proper age he was entered as a pupil at Leipsic, where his piano teacher was Moscheles. In 1866 he became piano teacher in Stearn's Conservatory in Berlin, but removed to the Brussels Conservatory in 1869. In 1878 he accepted an important position in the Conservatory at St. Petersburg, where he died in 1884.

The most eminent of Brassin's many remarkable pupils was probably the late Franz Rummel, who gave the present writer many interesting particulars concerning his personality and his wonderful playing. Brassin wrote two operas, some remarkable pianoforte studies, and many compositions and transcriptions for piano. One of his best is this of the "Magic Fire Scene," in which, as the comments upon the form and structure will explain, he not only distinguished his artistic sense by what he here set down of Wagner's music, but quite as much by what he omitted and by the way in which he managed to make the transcription include a complete story.

THE POETIC IDEA: The "Magic Fire Scene" is the climax and close of Wagner's opera "The Valkyrie," the second opera of the four composing the cycle of "The Nieblung's Ring." The central figure in this opera is Brunhilde, one of the nine Valkyrie Sisters, daughters of Wotan by earth-mothers. They are the immediate attendants upon Wotan, and their especial office is to appear to warriors destined to be slain in battle and to conduct them to Walhalla, there to enter into the society of the warlike and honored dead.

In pursuance of this duty, Brunhilde has been ordered to appear to Siegmund, who is to fall at the hand of Hunding. Yet Brunhilde, knowing that Siegmund's unborn son is destined to be the great Volsung hero, Siegfried, tries to protect Siegmund in his fight with Hunding, by interposing her shield against Hunding's blade. At this point Wotan himself appears and orders Brunhilde away, himself interposes his spear, upon which Siegmund's hero sword, "Needful," is broken, so that Siegmund falls, as has been determined, and Hunding also falls dead at the wave of Wotan's hand.

The next thing in the opera is the scene between Brunhilde and Wotan. The god is angry, because his authority has been set at naught; he therefore decrees that Brunhilde shall be banished from Walhalla, her office of Valkyr be taken from her, and she be cast into a deep slumber, and placed upon an inaccessible cliff on a high mountain, there to lie locked in dreamless sleep until some man passing that way shall awaken her to life with a kiss; to that man she is to be wife.

There is a long scene of anger on the part of the god, and of justification on Brunhilde's part, in the course of which she prophesies of the hero yet to be born (to the glorious strains of the Siegfried motive), and finally she secures one concession: that Wotan shall cause Loki (the god of fire) to kindle around her resting place such terrible flames that no man capable of fear shall ever pass through. Only a man who knows not fear may break through, and such an one Brunhilde might be willing to serve as wife

Then follows a very beautiful farewell, of Wotan to Brunhilde, in which he recounts their ties and the many associations they have had together. At the end of the farewell scene, begins the Magic Fire scene, in which Wotan summons Loki to kindle the flames, and having cast Brunhilde into this magic slumber, prepares to place her upon her long resting place.

The different musical elements which enter into this beautiful scene are explained under the head of "Form and Structure." To that we refer.

Wotan, whose authority is marked by his spear, summons Loki, kisses Brunhilde upon the eyes, a very long and farewell kiss, which takes from her the divine qualities, casts her into the dreamless slumber, lays her gently upon the couch prepared for her, shut down the visor of her helmet, places over her body the long Valkyrie shield, and gazing tenderly upon her and upon the wonderful fires which surround the scene, finally disappears in the glow at the back of the stage.

Such is the poetic story of this wonderful music.

The American student may be pleased to know that we heard this splendid music in this country several years before they had heard it in Europe. It happened through Liszt having the scene copied out and sent to the late Theodore Thomas in New York, through Thomas' friend and the Liszt-pupil, the late Dr. William Mason. In like manner he also sent the "Ride of the Valkyries," and the "Siegfried Funeral March."

FORM AND STRUCTURE: The Magic Fire scene opens with the motive of Wotan's Spear (measures 1 to 3). Whenever Wotan acts as a god in these four operas of the "Nieblung's Ring," his entrance upon the act is accompanied by his taking position and striking the rock with his spear-point, whereupon the sparks fly out and thunder is heard, for the spear of Wotan is his weapon of power. On it are written the "Runes of Life" by whose aid the gods rule the world.

The chromatic chords in whole notes and halves, in measures 4 to 19, are those softly dissolving and lingering numbers to which Wotan kisses from Brunhilde's eyes the godhead. These chords form the motive of "The Twilight of the Gods"—and mean the departing rule of the gods, as they lose firm purpose and good sense. All gods go that way, they say. The ascending arpeggios are merely to fill up time and give the succeeding chromatic steps time to be enjoyed.

In measures 20 to 31 we are dealing with the magic fires, which in response to Wotan's command, Loki, the god of fire, is kindling around Brunhilde's Cliff. The work of Loki intermingles in measures 32 to 35 with the "chromatic motive" in measures 4 to 19. In measure 36 begins the "slumber motive," the cradle song to which Brunhilde enters upon her long slumber. It consists of simply the four accented notes in measure 36 including the short note leading to the next measure, where it is repeated in the same chords, but differently placed and so on; this continues with various harmonic changes all the way through the work.

In the large notes of the bass voice, in measures 30 to 46, Wotan declares that none but the brave may come within the circle of these protecting flames. And in measure 47, the last quarter note begins in the bass the Siegfried motive, the motive of the Volsung hero, who is yet to be born. It is a wonderful melody and closes with the whole note in measure 54; but the part continues with other reminiscent motives from the Wotan Farewell. During the chromatic chords in measures 32 to 35, Wotan, by motions of the spear, directs the flames to enclose the place of Brunhilde's slumber. Finally Wotan disappears, and the curtain falls.

HOW TO STUDY: Do not hurry. Take plenty of time to master each division before passing on to

First the Spear Motive, with which the scene begins. The quarter notes should go at about the rate of 54 metronome, or like the swings of a pendulum about 48 inches long. Play each note very heavily and massively. Take the pedal instantly after sounding each note, except the 16th note. That is too short to need the pedal. The pedal makes the tone fuller. In measure 3, play gradually slower, emphasizing each tone. Be careful that you do not intermingle two tones in the same pedal.

The music in measures 4 to 19 may go even more slowly than the time of the first three measures. In measure 4, play the chord very softly. Then leaving the chord for the pedal to prolong (you must get upon the count "3." There is a very beautiful change here possible. As soon as you have finished the ar-

peggio, place your fingers back again upon the keys of the long chord, but without sounding them again. Then discontinue the pedal at about the count "4," and you will hear the very soft chord filling out the measure. Do this in every measure; take the chord silently again after finishing the arpeggio, and then release the pedal. It is impossible to play this too well.

The division from measure 20 to 35 consists mainly of the fire motives. The principal figure is that contained in measures 20 and 21. This we have in three keys: First in E, then (measure 24) in F sharp, then in A flat (measure 28). The chromatic descending figure in measures 30 and 31 is also part of the fire-activity of Loki. In measures 32 to 35, inclusive, we have the fire-motion combined with the descending chromatics of the Wotan farewell kiss. During these measures Wotan lays Brunhilde down upon her couch—generally supposed to be the softer side of level rock. He closes the visor of her helmet, places her long Valkyrie shield over her body, and now (in measure 36) the "slumber motive" is clearly heard. It consists of four quarter notes in even and sleepy motion, excepting that the last quarter is shortened sufficiently to give time to the 16th, F sharp. Thus if you play slowly one measure after the other of the melody



and then go on reading carefully the music as it here stands, you will find that every measure has in it this quiet melody, in whatever chord or harmonies the melody measure may contain. In the orchestra it is even more avoidable, because the instrumentation is planned to bring it out. Meanwhile, the 32d notes represent the flames, which all this time are growing higher and higher, and are presently completely encircling the place where Brunhilde is asleep. The rate of speed of this slumber motive (and of this entire part) should be at about metronome 63 for quarters, or the swings of a pendulum about 35 inches in length.

Look out to accent the high note which the left hand crosses over to play, the C sharp on beat 2, and the B on beat 3; also accent slightly the next note following these, the lower octaves, which the thumb holds. You will find, by study, that the "slumber motive" three times without change, has a different note for "4" in measure 39, and in measure 40 is in A major, but with a suggestion of minor in the F natural in the last beat. In measure 41 the slumber is in A minor; in m. 42 in F major, as also in m. 43. By this time the slumber motive is so firmly established, that Wagner sequences from it, or repeats it with increasing variations from its simple form in measure 36. It is a continual feature of the music to the very end.

Meanwhile, in m. 39 Wotan begins his saying, on the large note in the bass, E, as shown by the words below the notes. The song of Wotan should be brought out so plainly that the listener instantly recognizes the fact that here, while all sorts of fire music and slumber song are going on above, nevertheless the bass voice now has the predominant melody. It is very difficult indeed to bring out this voice with satisfactory fullness. It comes to him only who goes out after it by unyielding practice. Wotan's remark closes with the whole note in measure 46. But with the quarter note, last beat of measure 47, begins another melody in the bass, which is perhaps even more important; it is the Siegfried motive, of the Volsung hero. This motive closes with the whole note in measure 54, but the bass voice continues with other very beautiful melody, which sounds like something Wotan may be thinking, as he recalls his farewell to Brunhilde.

It is very desirable to practice this part until the 32d notes all are heard clearly in unfailing sureness. They go rather faster, at the rate of eight to a beat, or a little over 500 notes per minute, which while not fast for a straight scale or arpeggio, is fast when notes have to be definitely played according to changing harmonies, as in this instance.

Following are the marks of expression employed: Langsam (4) slow. Do not overlook the profusion of the letter p. It means that when we have played it softly, we must play it still more softly and more still.

The majority of players have a very imperfect idea of what it means to play softly. They seem to think that if when playing "loud" they play a little less loud, they are playing softly, which is not at all the case. If in playing loud, you play a little less loud, you are playing mezzo-forte; if you soften this, you will then be playing mezzo (middling); if you soften this, you will be playing mezzo-piano (middling soft); and only when you soften this, do you reach piano, which is five degrees down from loud playing.

Or to place it another way, when you play with the natural force of your fingers you are playing what is for you mezzo. Only by augmenting the natural powers of your fingers do you reach a real forte; and only when you seriously hold back the natural power of your fingers, do you get it down to an actual piano. But to return to our marks of expression.

The mark sf. (with sudden ferce) is to be taken more or less seriously according to its connection. In measure 15, for instance, where everything is very soft and delicate, it means that this one chord should have a very slight accent or distinction.

Staccatissimo is the superlative of "staccato," and means as clear and sharply defined as possible. It is more a question of extreme life at the very finger points, than of relative shortness of time on the keys. The staccato work continues entirely through the fire scene, wherever Loki is at work. As these notes are 16ths, running but four to a beat, there is plenty of time for the sharp finger work. In spite of the staccato the pedal might be used to advantage on the half note in measure 21, the second and third quarters in measure 23 (separately on each) and possibly for the time of an 8th note on each accent (the count "one") wherever a new harmony begins.

There are others, however, who would prefer to use the pedal much more than above described, inasmuch as the playing here is so high up on the keyboard, that the pedal can be prolonged without intermingling. For instance, to take the pedal with the accent (twice in the measure) and hold it during the time of a beat and a half, including the high note of the left hand. Then cut it off during the half beat before the accent. In such places as measures 30 and 31 the pedal must be used, if at all, in durations of an 8th note.

The expression Massig bewegt means with moderate motion. Take it as directed above, 76 for quarters, or a pendulum length of 24 inches.

Sehr maessiges Tempo means: "Very moderate speed"; we take it at 63 for quarters, or a pendulum length of 35 inches.

The good effect of this piece will be increased much more by playing the long tones so that they exactly fill up their occasionally long times, while the 16ths go very accurately and surely, augmenting and diminishing in loudness according to the harmony and seeming intensity. Steadiness and sureness will count for more than speed.

It is a piece into which you have to grow, before you can play it with actual authority.

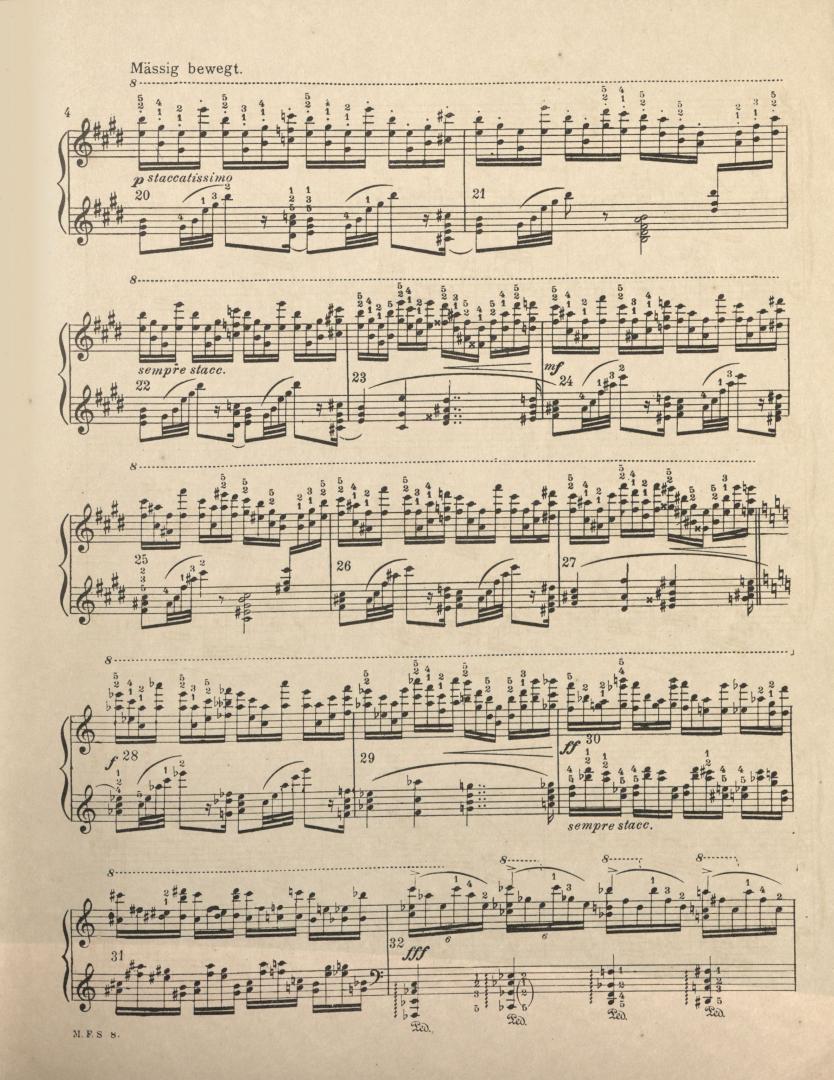
### Magic Fire Scene.

Revised, refingered and annotated by W. S.B. Mathews



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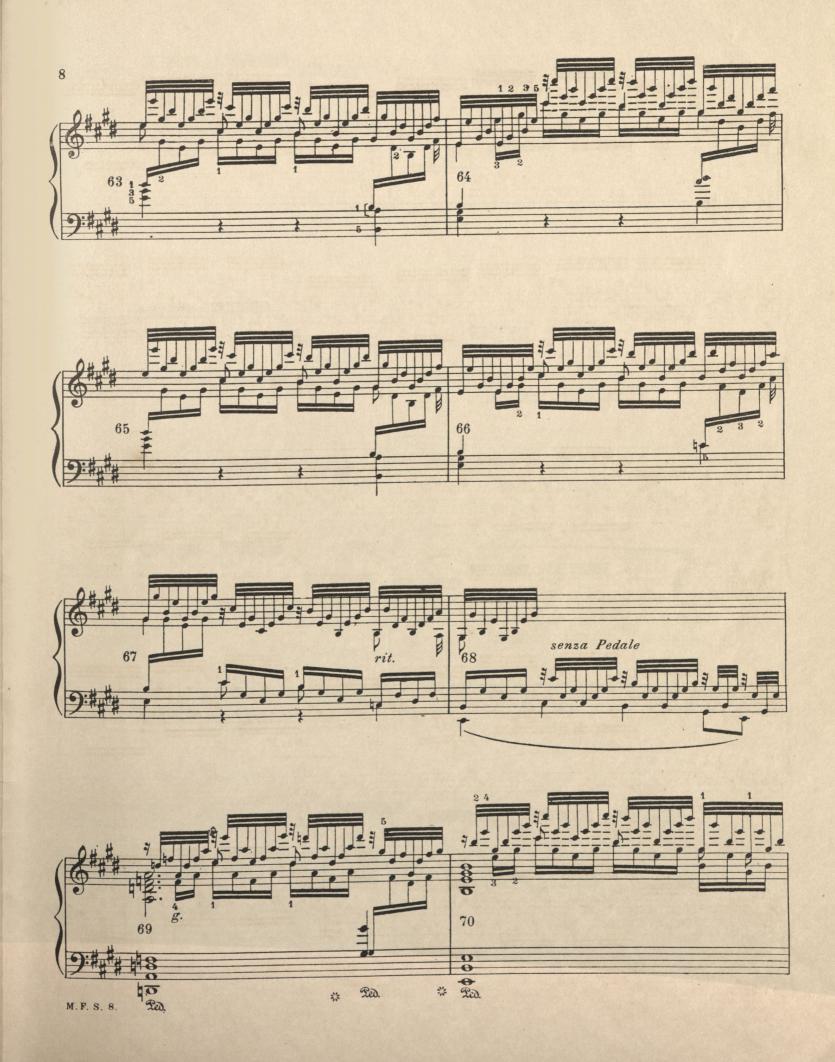


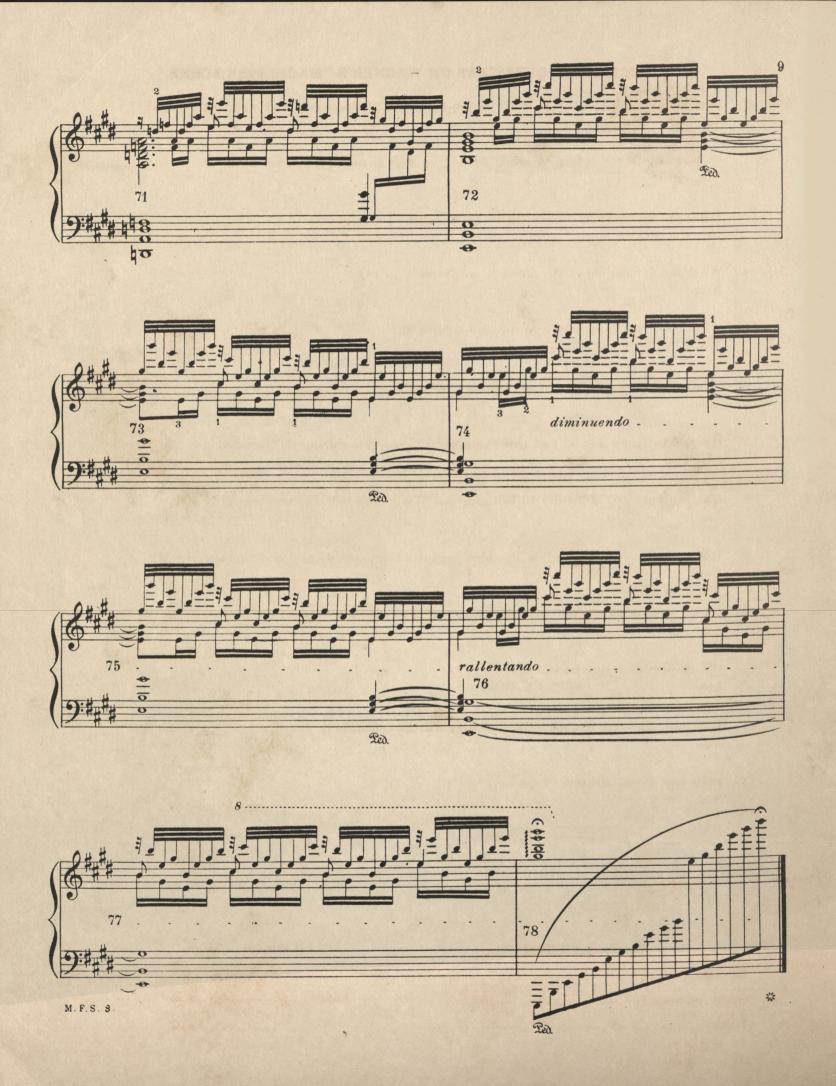


The large bass notes represent Wotan's motif and should be distinctly and strongly contrased against the ever recurring delicate tracery of the treble part. The entire last page represents a gradual diminuendo, and the very last measure is to be played with great deliberation. The constant passage work for the right hand requires perfect evenness of execution. All staccato notes are to be played from the wrist, the legato should be correspondingly connected.









	RECITATION QUESTIONS ON WAGNER'S "MAGIC FIRE SCENE."
1.	Beginning with measure 20, what is the signature of this piece, and what key is meant? Ans.
2.	In what measures before measure 20 do you find chords which also belong to the key of E major? Ans.
3.	What is the meaning of the music in measures 1 to 3? Ans.
4.	What is the meaning of the music in measures 4 to 19? Ans.
5.	What does the music mean in measures 20 to 35? Ans.
6.	What new music comes in at measure 36? Ans.
7.	How many times do you find this short melody repeated during the remainder of the piece?  Ans.
8.	Did you have any difficulty in bringing out Wotan's melody in measures 39 to 46? Ans.
9.	What motive (or melody) is it which begins in measure 47 and ends in measure 54? Ans.
10.	Which part of this piece seemed to you the most difficult to play? Ans.
11.	Which part of it do you like best? Ans.
12.	Who was Richard Wagner, and for what was he celebrated? Ans.
13.	Who was Louis Brassin (bras-san)? Ans.
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