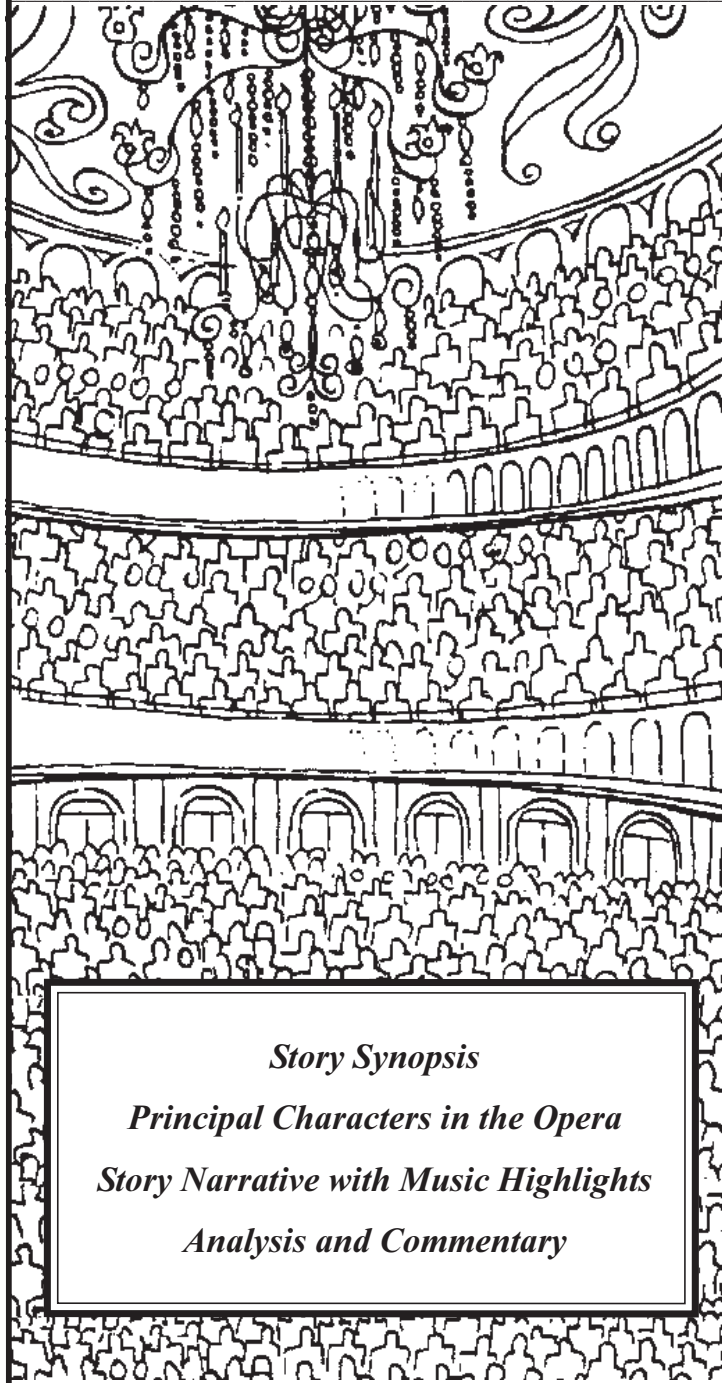


Der Freischütz

Opera Journeys Mini Guides Series



Story Synopsis

Principal Characters in the Opera

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

Analysis and Commentary



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Der Freischütz

(“The Free-shooter”)

Opera (*Singspiel*) in German in three acts

Music by Carl Maria von Weber

Libretto by Johann Friedrich Kind, after
Gespensterbuch (“Book of Ghost Stories”) 1810),
by Johann August Apel and Friedrich Laun

Premiere: Schauspielhaus, Berlin, 1821

Adapted from the
Opera Journeys Lecture Series
by
Burton D. Fisher

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Principal Characters in Der Freischütz

Max, a ranger (forester)	tenor
Kilian, a peasant	baritone
Cuno, head, or chief ranger	bass
Agathe, Cuno's daughter	soprano
Äennchen, Agathe's cousin	mezzo-soprano
Caspar, a ranger	bass
Zamiel, the Black Huntsman (the Devil)	speaking
Bridesmaids	sopranos
Ottokar, a Prince of Bohemia	baritone
A Hermit	bass
Hunters, peasants, spirits, bridesmaids, attendants	

TIME: at the end of the Thirty Years War

PLACE: Bohemia

Brief Story Synopsis

The story of *Der Freischütz* is founded on an old tradition among huntsmen in Germany: the huntsman who sells his soul to Zamiel, the demon-hunter, would receive seven magic bullets that always hit their mark, but the seventh bullet belongs to the demon and will be used by the demon to kill the huntsman. However, if the huntsman can find another victim for the demon, his life will be extended and he will receive a fresh supply of magic bullets.

In a shooting contest against Kilian, a peasant, Max, a young forester and master marksman, has been embarrassingly defeated, missing every target. Cuno, chief forester of Prince Ottokar, stops a fight that is about to erupt between the two men, but he warns Max that he will not be allowed to marry Agathe, his daughter, unless he wins the shooting competition tomorrow.

Max no longer has confidence in his marksmanship abilities. Caspar, a ranger who has secretly sold his soul to Zamiel, the Black Huntsman, yearns to have Max and Agathe destroyed; he was spurned by Agathe, and is envious of Max's marksmanship. Caspar gives Max his gun, and to his surprise, he immediately kills an eagle, which he was hardly able to see. Caspar reveals that the bullets were magic, and that Max can obtain more if he meets him at the Wolf's Glen at midnight. Max agrees.

In Agathe's house, a portrait of the ancestral Cuno fell from the wall and injured Agathe, causing her to be fearful of future dangers. Max arrives and claims that he must go to the Wolf's Glen in order to retrieve a dead stag, but he is hiding the truth that he is to meet Caspar to forge magic bullets: assurance of his victory in the shooting contest, and his marriage to Agathe.

At the Wolf's Glen, Caspar offers Max's soul to Zamiel, the Black Huntsman, in exchange for his own; Zamiel accepts the exchange. When Max arrives, both mold the magic bullets; when the seventh bullet is cast, Zamiel appears to claim his possession.

The next day, the Prince sets a white dove as the target for the shooting contest. Agathe arrives, nears the dove, and tries to stop Max from shooting. The dove flies into a tree where Caspar hides; Max shoots and fatally wounds Caspar, who dies, while cursing God and Zamiel.

Max confesses the evil pact he made with Zamiel to secure the magic bullets. The Prince offers prison or banishment as punishment. But the Hermit pleads for Max, suggesting that if he behaves piously for one year he should be pardoned and allowed to marry Agathe.

The Prince agrees and all praises the triumph of good over evil.

Story Narrative with Music Examples

The overture to *Der Freischütz* is a masterpiece of the genre; it employs motives and melodies that will reappear in the opera, and forecasts important dramatic moments. The technique certainly represents a striking novelty for its time, for it was seldom that composers presented the chief melodies and themes of their scores in their overtures. Mozart was that rare exception, using the music from *Don Giovanni*'s Supper scene in his overture. Certainly, Weber's success helped to propagate the practice, and quite obviously influenced the later overture masterpieces composed by Wagner for *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger*.

The overture reflects Weber's genius as a musical dramatist, as well as his inventiveness and skill as an orchestral colorist: its music possesses an unprecedented depth, brilliance, and a variety of tonal qualities.

The principal musical themes represent the underlying conflicts of the opera: the clash of the

powers of virtue with the opposing dark forces evil; good triumphs, and the overture concludes in a mood of rejoicing.

The overture begins with an adagio that captures the romantic spirit of the German forest: strings and woodwinds convey a mood of spiritual calm.



Horns introduce a melody associated with the huntsmen.



The terror of the Wolf Glen is suggested by strings and clarinets playing a sinister tremolando, followed by a wailing melody played by cellos.



Music suggesting Max's Act sense of hopelessness is recalled, followed by the music associated with the Black Huntsman and evil powers.



The full orchestra recalls the gruesome Wolf's Glen, when Max reacts in terror to the horrors surrounding him.



Violins and clarinets recall Agathe's aria from Act II, in which she expresses confidence that Divine grace will provide her ultimate happiness, and that Max will triumph in the shooting contest.



The entire overture conveys the essence of the forthcoming drama: the mysterious depths of the German forest; the conflict against the powers of evil; Max's horror and despair; Agathe's trustful innocence; and the final triumph of good over evil.

Act I: An open area of the Bohemian forest before a tavern.

Max sits alone at a table; he is deeply depressed. A tankard is before him, and his gun is in his arm. In the background there is a target, surrounded by a crowd of peasants. Kilian, a peasant, has just triumphed over Max in a shooting competition, evoking shouts of approval from the crowd.

Max despairs and strikes the table bitterly. As the crowd organizes itself into a celebration, he becomes even more despondent and discouraged, confounded as to why his skill as a marksman has suddenly deserted him.

The victorious Kilian is given trophies and decorated with flowers and ribbons, the latter bearing the stars he has just shot from the target. Peasants, marksmen, and women and girls march around Max, laughing, mocking, and taunting him for his failure.

Max springs up in rage and draws his dagger threateningly; he seizes Kilian and orders him to leave peacefully. Cuno, the chief ranger, arrives with Caspar and several other foresters; they intercede to prevent a fight between Max and Kilian. Cuno inquires about the cause of the trouble. Kilian announces that they were just fulfilling an ancient custom: teasing Max because of his failed marksmanship. Max is further humiliated when he must admit that Kilian's charge is true: that he has indeed lost his skills at marksmanship.

Caspar is Max's rival, seething with jealousy because Agathe rejected him for Max. Aside, he mutters expletives; in revenge, he has made a compact with Zamiel, the Black Huntsman, to destroy Max and Agathe, their spell is the reason for Max's failed marksmanship..

Cuno reveals that he is confused. Max was the best marksman among the rangers, but he has not been successful for four weeks. Caspar offers a glib

explanation for Max's failure: that someone must have cast an evil spell over Max and bewitched his gun. Mockingly, he proposes that Max call upon the dark powers of witchcraft for assistance in breaking the evil spell; the supernatural powers of the Black Huntsman. In truth, Caspar has made a pact with the Black Huntsman, but his term of grace has ended and to save his life he must deliver another soul to the Huntsman: Max. Cuno reproaches the unsavory Caspar, threatening him with dismissal. He turns to Max and cautions him that if he fails to win the shooting contest tomorrow he will lose the hand of his daughter, Agathe, as well as the succession to Cuno's post as the chief forest ranger. The peasants and huntsmen appeal to Cuno to tell them the ancient origins and significance of the shooting contest.

Cuno explains that it is a trial for the man who is to inherit the chief ranger's position. He tells of his great-great-grandfather, also named Cuno, who was the chief forester and one of the Prince's bodyguards. One day a man was tied to a stag, the usual ancient punishment for someone who broke the forest laws. But the Prince pitied the man's plight and promised that whoever could kill the stag without wounding the man would be made a hereditary ranger. The original Cuno was unconcerned with the reward but was deeply compassionate toward the wounded man. He fired at the stag and brought him down without inflicting any injuries to the man.

But enemies told the Prince that the deed had been accomplished by means of a "free" (or magic) bullet that could only have been acquired through a pact with the demon hunter. Kilian explains that there are seven bullets; six magic bullets always hit their mark, but the seventh, the "free" bullet, belongs to the demon himself, who guides it at his will. Afterwards, the Prince ordered that in the future, anyone aspiring to become the chief forester must undergo a shooting trial on the day when he is to marry; his betrothed must be of irreproachable character and must appear in a virginal wreath of honor.

After Cuno's story, Max remains despondent, expressing his foreboding at the forthcoming shooting trial. Cuno admonishes him to collect himself and have faith in his marksmanship skills. Others proceed to encourage Max, but Caspar tempts him to evil, insinuating that there are other powers than those of his own hand and eye that he can call to his aid. Cuno enthusiastically offers Max a final word of encouragement and departs with the huntsmen and foresters.

As darkness approaches, Kilian sarcastically wishes Max luck in the contest. He invites Max to join him in the tavern; a glass of wine and a dance with the girls to drive away his melancholy. But Max refuses, feeling too depressed to participate in superficial gaiety. Kilian and the others enter the inn.

Alone, Max addresses his misfortunes; he cannot understand what crime he has committed that has caused this punishment and horrible fate. Until now, his shooting talents were uncontested, and anything he aimed at fell before his gun. And when he returned in the evening with his booty, Agathe awaited him with love.

“Durch die Wälder, durch die Auen”

Moderato
MAX



Durch die Wälder, durch die Auen zog ich lei - chten Sinns da - hin!
 Throught the forests, through the meadows, joy was wont with me to stray!

As Max appeals to Heaven, Zamiel, the Black Huntsman, emerges from a thicket, a huge figure in dark green and flame-colored garb, his face a dark yellow, and a cock's feather in his hat. Zamiel quickly disappears.

Max's thoughts return to Agathe; he becomes despondent and overcome by doubt and despair at thoughts that he might fail in the contest and lose her as his bride. As he again appeals to God and wonders about the hopelessness of his fate, Zamiel reappears, but the demon quickly disappears at Max's mention of God.

Caspar arrives. He pretends sincere friendship and insists that Max drink with him. Max does not notice that Caspar has dropped a magic elixir into his glass. Under his breath Caspar calls for the aid of Zamiel. The Black Huntsman again raises his head from the thicket, terrorizing Caspar by reminding him to heed his unholy duty. Caspar coaxes Max to toast to Cuno, homage to the chief ranger that Max cannot refuse. Caspar then erupts into a brusque drinking song.

“Hier im ird'schen Jammerthal”

Allegro feroce
 ma non troppo presto
 CASPAR



Hier im ird'schen Jammerthal wir doch nichts als Plack und Qual, trüg' der Stock nicht Trauben!
 In this earthy vale of woe, if the grape grows now more, life would be only vexation!

Caspar offers a second toast, this time to Agathe: and then a third to the Prince. Again, Max cannot refuse. Max becomes confused and uneasy, and then expresses his desire to go home. Caspar restrains him by offering to help him succeed in his trial: an assurance of victory in the shooting contest and his future happiness with Agathe. He thrusts his gun into Max's hands, points to an eagle in the distant night sky, and orders Max to fire. Max accepts the challenge. He fires, and suddenly a huge eagle falls dead at their feet; Caspar plucks out some of its feathers and places them on Max's hat.

Max wonders by what magic he was able to fell the eagle; he was hardly able to see it in his sights. Caspar laughs mockingly, and then explains that his gun was loaded with a *Freikugel*, a "free" or magic bullet that is guaranteed to hit its mark. He reveals that it was his last, but he knows how to get more; seven more can be cast if Max will meet him at midnight in the Wolf's Glen.

At first Max the thought of the haunted Wolf's Glen at night appalls Max, but he consents, deceived by Caspar's protestations of good will and full of thoughts about Agathe. Max realizes that he has been led into temptation, but in desperation, he accedes.

After Max departs, Caspar reveals his deceitful plans: he will offer Max to the Black Huntsman in place of himself. He invokes the dark powers of evil and exults in his forthcoming triumph and Max's impending doom.

"Der Hölle Netz hat dich umgarnt"

CASPAR



Der Höl - le Netz hat dich umgarnt, der Höl - le Netz hat dich umgarnt.
The toils of hell now hold you fast,

Act II - Scene 1: It is evening. A room in Cuno's ancient hunting lodge.

The room is adorned with tapestries and trophies of the hunt. On the wall there is a picture of the ancestral Cuno. On one side of the room is Agathe's spinning wheel.

Agathe has a bandage on her head, the result of an injury incurred when the portrait of Cuno suddenly fell from the wall; she is frightened that it was the fulfillment of the ominous predictions of the Hermit, the holy man she visited that morning.

Ännchen, her cousin, stands on a stool, hammering a nail into the wall to restore the picture to its place. Ännchen is a carefree and cheerful young girl, her personality in contrast to that of Agathe, who remains profoundly serious. The old house has made Ännchen gloomy, and she expresses her yearning for a brighter ambience, and of course, a lively suitor: Agathe is very somber as she expresses her concern for Max's success in the shooting contest.

Agathe relates the details of her visit to the Hermit. He forecast danger and protected her by giving her consecrated roses. Ännchen proposes to place them outside the window so that the cold night air will retain their freshness.

Agathe is in a pensive mood and muses about the sorrow that always seems to accompany love, but her uneasiness surrenders to joy when she contemplates her forthcoming wedding to Max. She steps out onto the balcony, looks toward the starry night, and raises her hands, begging the protection of Heaven.

“Leise, leise, fromme Weise”

Adagio
AGATHE

Leise, lei - se, from-me Weise, schwing' dich auf zum Sternen kreise!
Softly, sighing, day is dying. Soar my prayer heavenward flying!

Agathe's pulse quickens when she hears footsteps approaching. It is Max, and the anticipation of seeing him causes her sadness to transform into joy and hope.

“All' meine Pulse schlagen”

Vivace con fuoco
AGATHE

All' meine Pul - se schlagen, und das Herz wallt un - ge - stüm,
How every pulse is flying, and my heart beats loud and fast,

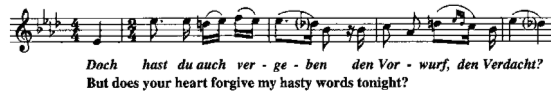
Agathe rapturously greets Max, but she immediately becomes agitated after noticing that he looks pale and troubled. She becomes disturbed when she notices an eagle's feather in Max's hat rather than

a trophy, but Max exhilarates her when he explains that he brought down an eagle with a marvelous shot.

Max explains that he must leave for Wolf's Glen immediately; he claims that he shot a stag there at dusk, and he must retrieve it before peasants steal it; but his real reason is that he is planning to meeting Caspar at the Wolf's Glen for the unholy business of forging magic bullets. At the mention of the Wolf's Glen, both Agathe and Ännchen express fear and fright; it is a terrifying and haunted place to visit at night, and they try to dissuade Max from going there. But Max has his secret mission and insists that he must depart, explaining that a huntsman must honor his duties, and can never show fear of the forest at night.

“Doch hast du auch vergeben den Vorwurf, den Verdacht?”

Andantino
MAX



Max pauses just before departing; Agathe forgives him and apologizes for doubting him.

Act II – Scene 2: The Wolf's Glen. It is night.

The Wolf's Glen is wild and terrifying, a fearsome hollow set between high mountains. From one mountain, a waterfall flows. The full moon shines, and a storm is gathering. There is a large cave and a tree destroyed by lightning; it is petrified and bears a mysterious glow. A large owl sits on one branch of the tree, on others, ravens and forest birds. Invisible spirits chant wildly, ghostly forms move about, and strange lights flicker.

Caspar is hatless and in shirtsleeves, busily forming a circle around a skull with black stones, and preparing his instruments of witchcraft. Nearby, there is an eagle's wing, a bullet-mold, and a crucible.

As Caspar invokes evil spells, sinister voices of invisible spirits chant gruesomely about a bride who is soon to die.

In the distance, a clock strikes midnight. Caspar draws his dagger and thrusts it into the skull, the signal that summons Zamiel, the Black Huntsman. Zamiel appears in a fissure of a rock and inquires who calls him.

Caspar crouches before Zamiel, pleading with the Black Huntsman to grant him three more years of life if he delivers a substitute victim: his friend Max, who is in quest of magic bullets, and his fiancée, Agathe. Zamiel replies regretfully that he has no power over Agathe because somehow she is protected, but he agrees to accept Max's soul; as such, Zamiel agrees to grant Caspar another three years pardon, but if he fails, Caspar will die. Zamiel pronounces Caspar's fate: "Tomorrow it must be him or you!"

After Zamiel disappears, Caspar wipes sweat from his forehead, and then refreshes himself with a drink from his hunting flask. The dagger and skull have disappeared, but in their place there is a cauldron with glowing coals that have risen from the earth. As the coals burn low Caspar throws sticks on the fire; the owl and other birds flutter their wings as the fire smokes and crackles.

Max appears on one of the rocks. He expresses his fear of the eerie darkness, the dreadful ghostly apparitions, the whirring of the birds flapping their wings, and the petrified tree. But he remains undaunted in purpose as he continues his climb to the Wolf's Glen. Suddenly, he becomes horrified when the moonlight reveals the spirit of his dead mother, clothed in white. He responds in shock: "She looks as she did in her coffin! She is imploring me to go back with warning glances!"

Caspar laughs at Max's fears. He urges Max to look again so that he can better see what has frightened him: the apparition of his mother has disappeared, and in its place there is Agathe, her hair loose and her form strangely adorned with straw and leaves. She is distraught and is about to plunge into the waterfall. As Max cries out that he must follow her, the apparition disappears.

Caspar urges Max to join him within the circle, assuring him that it will protect them against the surrounding spirits. As the moon fully disappears into the night sky, Caspar picks up the crucible and orders Max to watch him so that he may learn the art of casting the magic bullets. Caspar removes various ingredients from a pouch and throws them one by one into the fire: "First the leads, some broken glass from church windows, quicksilver, three used bullets, the right eye of an ancient hoopoe (bird), and the left eye of a lynx. *Probatum est!* And now a blessing on the bullets!"

Caspar prostrates himself to the earth and invokes Zamiel, exhorting him to bless the deed. The contents of the crucible begin to hiss, the only light the greenish white flame rising from the fire, the eyes of an owl, and the glow from the petrified tree.

Caspar proceeds with the casting of the magic bullets, and between each of the seven castings, supernatural apparitions appears, each evoking a sense of mounting horror. Anxiously and nervously, he begins to count.

“One!” He casts the first bullet and drops it out of the mold. Night birds fly down and gather around the circle, flapping their wings and hopping about.

“Two!” A black boar crashes through the underbrush.

“Three!” A storm rises, breaking the tops of trees and sending sparks flying from the fire.

“Four!” There is a rattling of wheels, fiery sparks, and the cracking of whips and trampling of horses.

“Five!” The sound of barking dogs and neighing horses fill the air. In the heights there is a rush of invisible hunters on foot and on horseback.

“Six!” The sky becomes completely black as the storm intensifies. There are crashing bursts of fearful lightning and roaring thunder as rain begins to fall in torrents. Dark blue flames spring from the earth. Trees are uprooted. The waterfall foams and rages. Pieces of rock are hurled downward from the mountain. From all over there is turmoil, the earth seeming to shake and shudder. Caspar shrieks as he trembles: “Zamiel! Zamiel! Help!”

“Seven!” Caspar is thrown to the earth. Max is tossed around by the storm. He leaps from the circle, seizes a branch from the tree, and screams for help.

The magic bullets have been cast. As the storm abates, the Black Hunter appears where the tree stood. He seizes Max’s hand and cries out in a terrifying voice: “Here I am!”

Caspar faints. Max makes a sign of the cross and falls to the ground. In the distance the clock strikes one. There is sudden silence. Zamiel disappears.

Act III: Scene 1 - In the forest.

Molto vivace



(Act III - Scene 1 is entirely in spoken dialogue and is almost always omitted in performance. It explains why the single bullet that Max will fire in the shooting contest was the seventh bullet cast at the Wolf's Glen: that Max had four bullets, and Caspar retained three. Each now has one left: Max made three marvelous shots that morning, and his last is for the contest, the one that Zamiel will be directing. Caspar used two of his bullets while hunting and has just fired the last bullet.)

Act III - Scene 2: Agathe's room. The day of her wedding.

On an altar there is a vase containing a bouquet of white roses. Agathe is alone, wearing white bridal attire with a green band in her hair; she is to be married as soon as Max wins the shooting contest.

Agathe prays tenderly before the altar for Divine care and protection.

“Und ob die Wolke siever hülle”Adagio
AGATHE

Und ob die Wol - ke sie - ver hüh - le, die Sonne bleibt am Himmelszei,
Although a cloud has spread over the heavens, the shines high in splendor,

Ännchen enters, also in bridal dress, but without flowers. (Neither Ännchen nor any of the other bridesmaids carry flowers because Agathe, for her bridal adornment, must take the holy roses that confer immunity against the magic bullet.)

Agathe is unnerved and crying, overcome by her fears of imminent danger. Ännchen consoles her, assuring her that she is merely expressing the tears of a bride. Agathe relates her nightmare: that she was transformed into a white dove and was flying from branch to branch. Max fired at her and she fell, but just in time, she was transformed into human form. However, at her feet there was a great black bird of prey wallowing in its blood.

Ännchen tries to dispel Agathe's fears with a ready explanation of her nightmare: that last night she was working late on her wedding dress and no doubt was thinking about it before she went to sleep; it was

the eagle's feather on Max's hat that made her think about the bird of prey.

Agathe is not easily pacified and retains her gloomy thoughts. Äennchen again tries to dispel her cousin's fears. She relates a tale about her aunt who was once frightened just before going to sleep because she believed that she saw a terrifying ghost approaching; its eyes were all afire and it was rattling a chain. She called for help, but when servants arrived with lights they found it was only Nero, the watchdog.

Agathe gradually yields to Äennchen and quiets her fears. Äennchen leaves to fetch the bridal wreath. The bridesmaids enter to provide cheer for the bride.

“Wir winden dir den Jungfernkranz”

Andante quasi allegretto
BRIDESMAIDS



Äennchen returns with the bridal wreath. She brings news that ancestor Cuno has been up to his pranks again: the picture again fell from its nail and almost tripped her. Agathe interprets the accident as an evil omen, but Äennchen explains that the nail must have loosened during last night's storm.

When Agathe opens the box, she is appalled that it does not contain white roses, but a silver funeral wreath, no doubt a mistake on the part of the old servant who had been sent to the town for the wreath. But all become horrified.

Agathe becomes deeply distressed by this fresh omen of evil, fearfully recalling the Hermit's warning that she is in danger. Agathe and Äennchen decide to substitute a new wreath: the Hermit's consecrated white roses. Äennchen takes them from the vase and binds them into a garland. She bids the bridesmaids resume their song again, and then takes Agathe by the hand and leads her through the door.

(The girls are unaware that the roses, which have stood before the altar, are now holy and can offer protection on their wearer.)

The bridesmaids once again sing of the Bridal Wreath, and all leave for the festivities, although their spirits have become dampened.

Act III - Scene 3: A clearing in the woods, with Prince Ottokar's tent on one side.

The court notables and guests are banqueting in the tent. On one side, huntsmen feast. Behind them game is piled in mounds.

Prince Ottokar is seated at a table in the tent; Cuno is at the foot of the table, and Max stands near him. Outside the tent, Caspar leans on his gun as he watches from behind a tree, occasionally calling on Zamiel for assistance in his diabolical plot.

The Prince reminds the company that the serious business of the day is the shooting contest. He tells Cuno that he approves of his choice of Max to be his son-in-law, but that he appears to be very nervous, no doubt because it is his wedding day. He tells Cuno to advise Max to be ready. Caspar climbs up into a tree and scouts the landscape as he awaits Zamiel.

Ottokar has heard much good about the bride and is eager to make her acquaintance. Cuno tells him that she should arrive soon, but asks whether the shooting trial might not begin before she arrives; he explains that Max has been a trifle unfortunate of late, and the presence of the bride may unnerve him during the contest.

Prince Ottokar turns to Max, advising him that if he fires one shot like the three he fired this morning, he will triumph. The Prince points out the target: a white dove sitting on a distant branch. Just as Max is taking aim, Agathe, Äennchen, and the bridesmaids come into view, just where the white dove target is sitting. Remembering her dream, Agathe cries out, "Do not fire! I am the dove!" The bird rises and flies to the tree where Caspar is sulking. As the dove flies away Max fires at it. Agathe and Caspar both shriek and fall to the ground. The others break into cries of horror, believing that Max has shot Agathe. But Agathe is not injured: more frightened than hurt.

"Ich athme noch"

Moderato
AGATHE



Agathe is led to a small mound, where Max falls on his knees in contrition. Attention turns to Caspar, who was fatally wounded by Max's shot and struggles convulsively, bathed in his own blood. Caspar says, "I saw the Hermit beside her. Heaven has won, my time

has come!” But Caspar has become the victim of his evil bargain with the Black Huntsman: he was unsuccessful in delivering Max to the demon to buy his pardon: the last magic bullet, directed by Zamiel, struck Caspar.

Unseen by the others, Zamiel has risen from the earth behind Caspar. Caspar addresses the Black Huntsman, who is visible to him alone, begging him to take his soul to hell. Caspar raises his hand and curses God, Heaven, and the treacherous Zamiel. As Caspar falls and dies, Zamiel instantly vanishes. The Prince orders the evil Caspar’s body thrown into the Wolf’s Glen.

The Prince turns his attention to Max, and gravely orders him to explain the mystery. Humbly, Max confesses his wrongdoing — the four bullets he fired that day were “free” bullets, cast together with the dead Caspar. All are astonished and shocked by his revelation. In punishment, the Prince angrily offers Max prison, or banishment forever from his dominion; he shall never have Agathe’s hand. Max breaks out into reproachful self-pity. Cuno and Agathe intercede for him, supported by the others. But the Prince is intransigent; Max must either flee the land or go to prison.

Suddenly, in a majestic entrance, the Hermit appears; all salute him respectfully. The Prince appeals to the Hermit’s holiness and asks him for judgment. The Hermit preaches about the fallibility and weakness of mankind. He urges that the trial shooting and its temptations be abolished. He preaches the virtue of tolerance and asks which among them has the right to throw the first stone at any sinner: vengeance is the right of Heaven alone.

“Leicht kann des Frommen Hertz”

Adagio
HERMIT



Leicht kann des Frommen Hertz auch wanken und überschreiten Recht und Pflicht?
What man is free from sin or error, or heart swayed by earthly passion?

And as for Max, the Hermit attests that his heart has always been virtuous. He advises that Max be placed on a year’s probation; after that time, if he proves himself, he may be given Agathe’s hand.

The Prince consents: that if Max proves himself during the probation, he will personally officiate at Max’s wedding to Agathe. Max and Agathe voicing their gratitude, and all express their happiness and praise God’s mercy: good has triumphed over evil.

Weber and Der Freischütz

In Germany, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Romanticism adapted a special quality: music, drama, philosophy and stagecraft were integrated into a harmonious union. As far back as the early 17th century, German opera was singspiel, a series of musical numbers connected by spoken dialogue. Although the action was usually comic in nature and the plots simple, occasionally a singspiel would reach tragic heights. Mozart composed many singspiels, a form of benediction of the genre from the Classical master. The singspiel genre served as bridge between Gluck's earlier reforms and the mature innovations of Richard Wagner.

In 1805, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, a story of injustices, noble love and sacrifice, brought a new intensity to the singspiel and German lyric theater. Carl Maria von Weber followed, molding elements of German melody and culture into romantic folk tales that possessed fantastic musical color and technical skill: in Weber's operas, the orchestra attained great prominence, commenting on the development of the drama through leading motives, or leitmotifs. But more importantly, Weber gave birth to German Romanticism; his operas dealt with popular German legend, medieval superstition, and elements of magic and mysticism.

The Romantic era is generally recognized as a period in Western music history that began in the early 19th century and lasted until the modernist innovations of the 20th century. Essentially, Romanticism evolved as a rebellion against Classical traditions; but more specifically, it was a backlash against the failed ideals of the 18th century Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment awakened the soul of Europe to renewed optimism. It nurtured the hope that democratic progress would consolidate egalitarian ideals, and that economically, the industrialization of Europe would decrease the disparity between wealth and poverty. It was the Enlightenment that inspired the French Revolution. Napoleon arose from its ashes, his primary crusade to destroy those traditional enemies of human dignity and freedom, the oppressive autocratic and tyrannical European monarchies: in particular, the Austrian Hapsburg Empire. (That goal was finally achieved one hundred years later at the

conclusion of World War I.) But Napoleon was defeated by the victorious Grand Alliance: the coalition of England, Russia, Prussia and Austria. After their victory, the European powers sought revenge against the liberal and democratic ideals fomented by the French Revolution, ultimately exercising severe military force to quell discontent.

Napoleon and France had threatened the social order of Europe and upset its delicate political power balances. In the aftermath of Napoleon, the victors strove to consolidate and strengthen their national power: the Hohenzollern King of Prussia, Frederick William III, acquired the Kingdom of Saxony in an attempt to strengthen Prussian power and offset the traditional dominance of Austria in German affairs, a reward that was justified by the treacherous collaboration of Saxony's King Frederick Augustus I with Napoleon; the Austrian Hapsburgs, badly weakened by Napoleon, were prompted by Prince Klemens von Metternich to create a newly strengthened France that would balance Austrian fears of Russian opportunism.

In 1815, the Congress of Vienna attempted to stabilize Europe's balance of power by imposing a peace settlement with France that preserved it as a great European power, but the country was reduced to its ancient rather than natural borders. The German Confederation was reorganized by consolidating its original 300 states into 39 sovereign states, ostensibly providing a renewed strength that would represent a barrier against any future expansion by France into the Rhineland. With the balance of power established, the Congress of Vienna had created a bulwark of powerful states to thwart fears of possible future expansion of the Russian colossus into Western Europe, as well as deter the reemergence of a threatening France.

But the ultimate reality of the agreements that emanated from the Congress of Vienna was that the Quadruple Alliance of Austria, Prussia, Great Britain, and Russia, had essentially imposed themselves as the unwanted guardians over most of the European states; they had become rulers of nations that were heedless to national cultural or ethnic inclinations of those states. As such, many nations were ruled by foreign powers: Greece, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Belgium, Poland, Hungary, Italy, and particularly, the German Confederation of States.

The Post-Napoleonic restoration of unwanted foreign rule fostered oppressive actions by the ruling

autocracies, which in turn precipitated the growth of romantic dreams of nationhood and self-determination among the governed states; those subjugated nations adopted the idea that being kin, numerous and strong, was a means of achieving social progress and political stability.

In effect, the French Revolution had awakened dreams of human progress, and the dreams failed to be suppressed by Napoleon's defeat. As the 19th century unfolded, there was an impassioned clamor for social and political reform, the abolition of poverty, and the inauguration of economic freedoms. The ruling European monarchies promised reforms but failed to provide them. There was an uneasy political equilibrium: frustration and anxiety exploded into social unrest and revolutionary riots in virtually every major city in Europe. During the years 1815 to 1848, there were armed revolts by liberals, democrats and socialists, that the ruling authoritarian powers countered with fierce and oppressive repression.

The uprisings were twofold in purpose: firstly, they demanded social and political reform; and secondly, they represented outcries for national identity, self-determination, and liberation from alien rule. Nevertheless, the monarchies remained the unwanted custodians of nations, and were unhesitant to invite neighboring allied armies to intervene and quell domestic uprisings: the "Metternich System" that was created by the Congress of Vienna.

Those failed utopian dreams transformed into profound pessimism and skepticism, a frustration that nurtured the underlying ideology of the Romantic movement in art, literature, and music, a period many historians place chronologically between the political and social turmoil that began with the storming of the Bastille and the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, and the last uprisings in European cities in 1848; however, many refer to the great flourishing of art during most of the 19th century as the Romantic era.

Essentially, Romanticism represented a pessimistic backlash against the optimism of the 18th century Enlightenment and the Age of Reason; Rousseau, a spokesman of Enlightenment ideals, had projected a new world of freedom and civility. But the Romanticists viewed those failed Enlightenment ideals of egalitarian progress as a mirage and illusion, elevated hopes and dreams that dissolved in the Reign of Terror (1793-94): a despair that was reinforced by

Napoleon's preposterous despotism, the post-Napoleonic return to autocratic tyranny and oppression, and the economic and social injustices nurtured by the Industrial Revolution.

But it was specifically the Reign of Terror and the subsequent devastation of the Napoleonic wars that totally destroyed any dreams for progress remaining from the Enlightenment. Like the Holocaust in the 20th century, those bloodbaths shook the very foundations of humanity by invoking man's deliberate betrayal of his highest nature and ideals; Schiller was prompted to reverse the idealism of his exultant "Ode to Joy" (1785), which Beethoven later immortalized in the Choral of his Ninth Symphony, by concluding that the new century had "begun with murder's cry." To those pessimists — the Romanticists — the drama of human history was approaching doomsday, and civilization was on the verge of vanishing completely. Others concluded that the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror had ushered in a terrible new era of unselfish crimes in which men committed horrible atrocities out of love not of evil but of virtue. Like Goethe's Faust, who represented two souls in one breast, man was considered a paradox, simultaneously the possessor of great virtue as well as wretched evil.

Romanticists sought alternatives to what had become their failed notions of human progress, and sought a panacea to their loss of confidence in the present as well as the future. As such, Romanticists developed a growing nostalgia for the past by seeking exalted histories that served to recall vanished glories: writers such as Sir Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo, penned tributes to past values of heroism and virtue that seemed to have vanished in their contemporary times. Romanticists believed that intellectual and moral values had declined; modern civilization was perceived as transformed into a society of philistines, in which the ideals of refinement and polished manners had surrendered to a form of sinister decadence. Those in power were considered deficient in maintaining order, and instead of resisting the impending collapse of civilization and social degeneration, they were deemed to have embraced them feebly and without vigor.

Romanticists became preoccupied with the conflict between nature and human nature. Industrialization and modern commerce were considered the despoilers of the natural world: steam engines and smokestacks were viewed as dark manifestations of commerce and veritable images from

hell. But natural man, uncorrupted by commercialism, was ennobled. So Romanticism sought escapes from society's horrible realities by appealing to nature and naturalism: strong emotions, the bizarre and the irrational, the instincts of self-gratification, and the search for pleasure and sensual delights. Ultimately, Romanticism's ideology posed the antithesis of material values by striving to raise consciousness to more profound emotions and aesthetic sensibilities.

Many Romanticists were seeking an alternative to the Christian path to salvation. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) strongly influenced early German Romanticism when he scrutinized the relationship between God and man, ultimately concluding that man — not God — was the center of the universe. Following Kant, David Friedrich Strauss wrote the extremely popular "Life of Christ" that deconstructed the Gospel. And finally, toward the end of the 19th century, Nietzsche pronounced the death of God. Theologically and philosophically, German Romantics believed in the existence of God, but they were not turning to Christianity's Heaven for salvation and redemption, but rather, to the spiritual bliss provided by human love; for the Romanticists, the spiritual path to God and human salvation could only be achieved through idealized human love, compassion, and personal freedom.

A popular early philosopher of the Romantic era was Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72), who articulated his iconoclastic theories in "Das Wesen des Christenthums," in which he deemed all religions — including Christianity — as mythical inventions, creations of a nonexistent God who was manifested through imaginary projections, or an idealization of the collective unconscious. As such, the supposed divine fallibility of church and state was deemed pure illusion, a tyrannical authority that had no claim for its existence, and was ripe for destruction and replacement by a new social order that was based firmly on the principles of human love and justice; Karl Marx hailed Feuerbach as the unwitting prophet of the social revolution he prophesied.

Feuerbach embraced anticlericalism, firmly believing that church and state authority had an inherent unnaturalness and inhumanity that conditioned man away from his natural human instincts of creativity and love. During the Enlightenment, Rousseau wrote: "Man was born free,

and everywhere he is in chains,” a conception that nurtured the ideal of the “noble savage,” an implication that natural man possessed virtues that were uncorrupted by the evils of civilization. Many Romantics — and particularly German Romantics — reasoned that man’s instinctive need for love and fellowship explained its creation of myths and art. And if the great myths were projections of humanity’s highest ideals and aspirations, then religion served to impede man’s natural inclinations by imposing an arbitrary system of rigid dogmas that supported the state rather than man; the enemy of man was the authoritarian state and the church that opposed man’s natural instincts, and particularly his freedom to love.

In “Civilization and its Discontents,” Freud later postulated that there was a perpetual conflict between humanity’s instincts for life — and love — that were being opposed and destroyed by man’s aggressive and self-destructive instincts: authoritarian state power was considered a by-product of that aggression. As such, in man’s struggle for survival, the weak ceded to the aggression of the strong, which served to repudiate humanity’s nobler aspirations. In aggression-bred authoritarianism man became exploited, subjected by the strong, and abused by a privileged few who imposed their will on the many. Freud concluded that it was considered natural for instinctive man to live in a free society, and unnatural for man to live in a law-conditioned authoritarian state. Therefore, the state’s rule became a crime against human nature, and therefore against nature itself.

Feuerbach’s denunciation of the tyrannical church and state authoritarianism, combined with the idea of man’s natural instincts for love and freedom, represented the core ideals of the 19th century Romantic movement: man’s instinctive desire for love and freedom.

Essentially, Romanticists yearned for a world of idealized spiritualism that would replace mundane values. In Germany, Romanticism manifested its own unique character. Germans possessed a prideful form of cultural nationalism that they believed ennobled the intrinsic spirit of its people: an ideology termed “volkish” (“of the people”).

Germans specifically worried that industrialization would displace the cultural core of their society: farmers, artisans, and peasants. They believed that their people possessed the noble “volksseele” (“folk’s

soul”), a specific national ethos that was shared by kindred Germans and united them through customs, arts, crafts, legends, traditions, and superstitions, values and virtues that had been passed on to them from generation to generation.

In the anthropological sense, Germans believed they possessed a unique — if not superior — “Kultur” (culture), that manifested itself in lofty spiritual achievements in art, literature, and history. As such, their “volk” (folk) heritage made them different from the rest of Europe in terms of their identity, communal purpose, and organic solidarity. Early German Romantics, such as J. G. Herder (1744-1803), the author of *Ideas on the Philosophy of History and Mankind* (1784), proposed that the “volk” had produced a living culture, which, despite its humble beginnings among peasants and artisans, represented the seedbed of the unique German Kultur; it was an exalted personality that was portrayed in art, poetry, epic, music, and myth. As such, German culture was individual and different, and possessed its own particular “volksgeist” (“folk spirit”) and “volksseele” (“folk’s soul.”)

The German conception of Kultur was synonymous with nationalism; it represented the antithesis of Zivilization (civilization), a French perception of politeness and sophistication, urban society, materialism, commerce and superficiality. But German Romantics were seeking a cultural renaissance, and yearning for independence from their perceived slavish adherence to alien intellectual and cultural standards: in particular, French cultural values and the *philosophes*, which imposed literary and artistic values that contradicted the very essence of the German “volk” culture.

Although Germans were divided politically into separate states, they were united by language and culture. Romanticist Germans opposed French Zivilization and urged Germans to return to their cultural past and awaken their powerful mythology that chronicled their roots and represented their vast spiritual history. Schiller aptly evoked the spirit of the German cultural renaissance: “Schöne Welt, wo bist du?” (“Beautiful world, where are you?”) During this raising of their historical and cultural consciousness, writers, artists, philosophers and musicians revived previously neglected German ancient literature, sagas, legends, ballads, and fairy tales. They believed that this vast heritage of their “folk soul” possessed virtues of naturalness, a depth of knowledge, and spiritual

human values that they deemed more profound than those existing in the surrounding world: the essence of German Romanticism.

The most notable 19th century excavators of the German past were the Grimm brothers, who energetically recovered myths and legends of the ancient German and Teutonic peoples. Through them, the 12th century Nibelungenlied was first translated into modern German, a spiritual epic, or German Iliad, that Romanticists believed captured the soul of German culture: Richard Wagner would later adapt the saga for his epic *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), was not only one of the literary architects of German Romanticism, but also one of the most powerful and versatile figures in the cultural and intellectual history of Western civilization. He was indeed a colossus of literature, and his literary humanism was considered by many to be an entire culture in itself. Goethe's monumental *Faust, Part I* (1808), and *Faust Part II* (1833), became the inspiration for a legion of artistic creations in concert music, opera, ballet and fine art.

Germany's golden age of literature, which began in the 18th century, was spearheaded by Goethe and his noted contemporaries Schiller, Herder and Schlegel. Their revolution was called "Sturm und Drang" ("Storm and Stress"), an emotion-centered ideology that challenged the values of German society; "Sturm und Drang" is synonymous with the German Romanticist movement.

German Romanticism represented a backlash to the fundamental Enlightenment ideals of rationalism; in German Romanticism, subjectivism opposed the rational. As such, it rejected conventionality, defied authority, promoted greater naturalness of expression, and praised the irrational side of human experience. Imagination was paramount; as such, many artistic themes were dreamy, fantastic and melancholy. Aesthetic sensibility was considered a religious experience, a spiritual ecstasy that purely expressed complex emotions.

Goethe's first novel, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) (1774), became the inspiration for Massenet's opera *Werther*; it is an intimate romantic tragedy in which emotions and passions overcome reason and thus lead to tragic consequences. In German Romantic literature, longing ("Sehnsucht") became the common ground for both

spiritual elevation and love: that same longing and yearning for love became the central focus of Wagner's later masterpiece, *Tristan and Isolde* (1865). To some, *Sorrows* may be the first psychological novel, since it is Werther's psyche from which his world emanates; he constantly projects his subjective states into his surrounding world, and those projections affect his mood swings.

The novel was written at a time when Germans were dissatisfied with the material and spiritual conditions of existence. It mirrors a generation of people living before the French Revolution who yearned to escape from their perception of an antiquated social structure: it was the new ideology called German Romanticism, and Goethe was one of the most powerful forces of the movement.

German Romantics were in opposition to the earlier Classical traditions. Their ideology was based on an almost mystical conception of a work of art and the artist as a divine creative spirit. Because art possessed the power to evoke the transcendent world, they considered the creators of art beyond the ordinary human sphere; the creative artist responded to his inspirations, and therefore, must be free from Classical restrictions and conventions.

These Romantics emphasized the infinite and the indefinable, opposing Aristotelian concepts of beginning, middle and end. As such, works would intentionally be fragmentary in character, seemingly an improvisation: musical pieces would either be lengthy to the extreme, or brief, such as short piano pieces or art songs.

In its anti-Classical mode, Romantic composers created new effects by exploring adventurous harmonic patterns, new tonal relationships and textures and instrumental sonority. Performers were no longer encouraged to add creatively to a composition through their own ornamentation or improvisation, but rather, the composers were exalted, and the performers were required to religiously convey the composer's intentions.

In the Romantic era, music was freed from any preexisting notions that it possessed no intrinsic meaning. And, Romantic music became more closely allied than ever to literature and the musical language because it was believed that music could express an indefinable and transcendent essence. Thus, Romantics innovated new musical forms and genres:

Liszt's symphonic poems; Berlioz's program symphony.

In opera, German Romantics in particular developed a folk-oriented form of national culturalism that expressed their perceived ethos: a sense of their national soul that was first achieved by Carl Maria von Weber.

Weber was born in Germany in 1786; he died in London in 1826. He was a sickly child who was born with a hip disease that gave him a lifelong limp. Despite his infirmity, he was forced to travel continually with his parents; his father was a violinist in various small orchestras. His father compelled him to study music industriously, determined to develop his son into a prodigy. At eleven, the young Weber studied in Salzburg and Munich. Shortly thereafter he completed his first opera, *Die Macht der Liebe und des Weins* (1798); his second, *Das Waldmädchen* (1800) was a complete failure.

In 1803, Weber studied in Vienna, and two years later received a post as conductor of the Breslau Opera, where he was in perpetual conflict with the management and the company because of his dissolute and irresponsible behavior; at the same time, he aroused the hostility of the public. After Breslau, he received a post at Stuttgart, which came to a sudden end when he was accused of stealing funds. Afterwards, Weber travelled, appearing often as a concert pianist.

In 1811, he composed a comic singspiel opera for Munich, *Abu Hassan*, his first major success. Weber himself referred to the opera as "the kind of opera all Germans want — a self-contained work of art in which all elements, contributed by the arts in cooperation, disappear and reemerge to create a new world."

In 1813 Weber settled in Prague and became director of the opera. Three years later, he was engaged as musical director of the Dresden Opera, a post that proved so successful that it was confirmed for life.

Weber's mature operas heralded the birth of German Romantic operas, and marked a turning point in German musical history: *Euryanthe* (1823), *Oberon* (1826), and the comedy *Die Drei Pintos* ("The Three Pintos"), the latter begun in 1821, but completed by Mahler in 1888.

Weber's *Der Freischütz* became one of the most significant works in the history of German opera: it laid the foundations of German national opera, influencing Marschner, Lortzing, and above all, Wagner, who transcended Weber in his development leitmotiv techniques, dramatic recitative, and the symphonic use of orchestra.

At the end of the 18th century, most of the German courts had shown a preference for Italian over German opera. Weber's experiences at Dresden as music director was one long struggle against those Italian musical invaders, a preference supported at the time by the royal family and most of the aristocracy.

But while in Dresden, Weber's implacable idealism about the opera art form intensified — as well as his German patriotism. He became inflamed with an ideal and decided to compose a truly national opera, a new conception that would represent a compromise between drama and music, which he concluded had become trivialized by Italian as well as French opera.

Weber was strongly influenced by Spohr, whose *Faust* (1813) he conducted at its premiere in Dresden; it was an opera heavily infused with recurring musical motifs that were woven like delicate threads, uniting the entire work artistically and dramatically. Later, E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Undine* (1816) achieved similar objectives. Weber adapted those techniques, but he would transcend them with music of unsparing tonality and intensive orchestral color.

In 1810, Weber discovered the subject of *Der Freischütz* in a collection of tales by Johann August Apel and Friedrich Laun: *Gespensterbuch* ("Book of Ghost Stories.") He immediately recognized its operatic possibilities and requested that the libretto be written by his friend, Alexander von Dusch. The endeavor was shelved for some seven years, during which time Weber was kapellmeister in Dresden, honing both his musical skills and kindling his patriotic spirit.

In 1817, he resumed the project, but this time his librettist was Friedrich Kind (1768-1843), a fellow member of the Dresden literary "Liederkreis," and a rather vain and over-ambitious lawyer and man of letters. Kind had treated a similar subject in his novel, "Die Jägersbräute" ("The Hunter's Bride"), and within ten days, enthusiastically presented the libretto to Weber; it was provisionally entitled *Der Probeschuss*

("The Trial Shot"), later changed to *Die Jägersbraute* ("The Hunter's Bride."). But just before the opera's premiere in 1821, apparently at the urgent solicitation of Count Brühl, the director of the Royal Opera in Berlin, the opera was renamed *Der Freischütz*; a term that actually has no definitive English equivalent, but is generally translated as "The Free-shooter"; nevertheless, the opera's creators immediately recognized the superiority of this title.

Der Freischütz became the first musical piece to be staged at the new Schauspielhaus in Berlin. The premiere generated conflict and controversy: the public was wildly enthusiastic, but the critics were less favorable. There were critics who could not understand why the opera had succeeded, many of them claiming that it was a "colossal nothing created out of nothing," or "the most unmusical racket ever put on stage." But the opera appealed to the affections of the German people, an affection for the work that has never diminished.

The underlying story of *Der Freischütz* is founded on an old legend among huntsmen in Germany: the man who sells his soul to Zamiel, the demon hunter, or Black Huntsman, would receive seven magic bullets; the bullets always hit their mark, but the seventh bullet belongs to the demon, who, after three years, will use it at his will to kill the huntsman who had sold his soul to him. However, if the huntsman is able to find a substitute victim for the demon, his life will be extended and he will receive a fresh supply of magic bullets.

The action of the story takes place during the period following the Thirty Years' War. Weber was determined to apply a more profound interpretation to the original folk tale. He avoided conflicts with the censorship authorities by recreating elements of the tale, and provided much of the characterization in accordance with his own impulses.

Originally, the opera libretto was in four acts, the first act divided into two scenes. The first scene was to take place at the Hermit's house in a forest; the second before the tavern. Weber deleted the Hermit scene. The old Hermit was to be seen praying before an altar. He has had a dream of the devil lurking in the darkness and stretching out his terrifying hand towards an unspotted lamb: that lamb is Agathe, and the demon is also trying to ensnare her bridegroom, Max. The holy man implores the grace of Heaven to protect the innocent lovers from the demon.

As the Hermit reflects anxiously that he has not seen Agathe for three days, she suddenly appears, bringing him a pitcher of milk, and followed by her cousin Ännchen, who carries a small basket of bread and fruit. After Ännchen leaves, the Hermit inquires about Max, Agathe's betrothed; he learns that Max is uneasy about the shooting trial that is to take place the next day. The Hermit reveals his horrifying vision, which he interprets as a warning of danger to Agathe. He then exhorts Agathe to preserve the purity of her heart, and in return, she begs him to remember her in his prayers. As she is about leave, an inner voice compels the Hermit to give her a gift. He turns to a rose bush, the first cutting of which had been brought to him long ago by a pilgrim from the Holy Land: each summer he collects and presses the leaves, to which the peasantry attribute supernatural powers of bodily healing and protection from harm. He gives Agathe some of the consecrated roses as a bridal gift, and dismisses her with a further exhortation to be virtuous.

Weber had doubts about the effectiveness of opening the opera with the Hermit scene, but librettist Kind insisted on its retention, declaring that without it the work would seem like a decapitated statue. However, Weber consulted his fiancée, Caroline Brandt, an opera singer whose sense of drama and the stage whom Weber respected immensely. She was emphatic in her opinion: "Out with these two scenes! Plunge right into the life of the people at the very beginning of the opera and start with the scene in front of the tavern."

Thus fortified, Weber approached Kind again; he pointed out to him the novelty of the Hermit scene, and the fact that the opera would begin by giving too much importance to the minor character of the Hermit; and, he had doubts whether many German theaters had access to so rich a bass voice as he required for the Hermit's role. Kind reluctantly conceded, but his pride of authorship made him print the discarded first act in later years; in 1871, Oskar Möricke set it to music, using Weber's original musical motives.

There can be no doubt that the opening of the opera had been improved by the sacrifice of the original Hermit scene; but it is also true that without it the events at the conclusion of the opera are not fully intelligible. Nevertheless, the libretto does fill in those details; Agathe explains her visit to the Hermit in Act II, and the holiness of the roses is explained in Act III-Scene 2.

Der Freischütz was a milestone in the evolution of German opera, thoroughly German in spirit, subject, ideals, characterization, setting, and music. Its story derives from one of those immemorial folktales whose origin reaches back to the genesis of the early German peoples: a lifestyle that was simple and wholehearted, a people who were compassionate and sincere, and huntsmen and villagers who share their characteristic joys and pleasures. The German people recognized themselves in the opera story, their country and their culture, the opera summing up German aspirations towards their own identity, traditions, and background. And the subject dutifully captured the German delight in elements of superstition, the supernatural, and the diabolic: the Wolf's Glen scene of *Der Freischütz* thoroughly captures the essence of mysterious and arcane powers. Wagner latter commented that *Der Freischütz* is "the most German of all operas."

The opera's colossal success was a tribute to the genius of Weber, but also that of a nation's yearning to express its unique culture and identity through musical theater. One of Weber's biographers, F. W. Jähns noted that the premiere of *Der Freischütz* took place on June 18, 1821, also the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo: the parallel drawn was that the emancipation of Germany from the domination of Napoleon coincided with the liberation of German opera from its bondage to Italian and French influences. Although German opera did not immediately succeed in extinguishing Italian and French influences, the nation had erected a rival from which foreign genres never quite recovered.

The overture to *Der Freischütz* is an acclaimed masterpiece; it employs motives and melodies that reappear in the opera, forecasting important dramatic moments. It was a technique that was certainly a striking novelty for its time because it was seldom that composers presented the chief melodies and themes of their scores in their overtures: Mozart was that rare exception, using the music from *Don Giovanni*'s Supper scene in his overture. Certainly, Weber's success helped to propagate the practice, and quite obviously influenced the later overture masterpieces composed by Wagner for *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger*.

The overture reflects Weber's genius as a musical dramatist as well as his inventiveness and skill as an orchestrator: its music possesses an unprecedented dramatic depth and brilliant melodiousness. His

ingenious skill in orchestration certainly contributed to the development of subsequent orchestral expressiveness: the color values of his woodwinds, and the picturesque use of horns unique for their times.

The opera contains many German folk songs and dance tunes as well as original folk-like songs composed by Weber, the latter's melodies and rhythms sounding so authentic that they seem to represent the authentic voice of the German people: simple melodies that continue to speak to their audience with refreshing vigor and directness.

Agathe's music is saturated with romantic sentiment and tenderness; it also dutifully captures her sense of fear of unknown dangers. And Äennchen's lightheartedness, as well as Caspar's roguishness are realistically captured in the music.

Every part of the Wolf Glen's scene achieved a new plateau in terms of music's descriptive power: its vivid realism, diabolism, and nocturnal terrors. Despite the limitations of its libretto, the opera is an example of Weber's extraordinary ability to compose effectively for the theater, a talent he honed by years of work in revitalizing the opera companies in Prague and Dresden.

In 1823, Weber's *Euryanthe*, was composed for the new opera in Vienna and was critically acclaimed. His last opera, *Oberon* (1826), was composed for Covent Garden, conducted by Weber, and described by the composer as "the greatest success of my life." The stress and pressure of producing *Oberon* in London undermined his health, and he died in his sleep just before making his journey home. He was buried in London, but 18 years later his body was transferred to Dresden; for this second burial, Wagner wrote special music and delivered the eulogy.

The road from the German Romanticism of Weber leads directly to Wagner, as Wagner himself conceded. Before Wagner, more than any composer, Weber made significant use of leitmotifs, and gave greater symphonic importance to the orchestra, and captured the very essence of the German soul in his opera subjects.

Weber's *Der Freischütz* — as well as *Euryanthe* — are singspiels that represent a significant bridge between Gluck's earlier reforms and the more mature innovations of Wagner. With Weber, the groundwork had been prepared for opera to evolve toward its most significant metamorphosis: music drama.

