

Siegfried Idyll

Richard Wagner/Michael Zearott/Verdehr Trio

In her diary, Cosima Wagner described the morning of December 25, 1870 in the following manner: "As I awoke, my ear caught a sound which swelled fuller and fuller; no longer could I imagine myself to be dreaming, music was sounding, and such music. When it died away, Richard came into my room with the five children and offered me the score of the symphonic birthday poem. I was in tears, and so was the rest of the household. Richard had arranged the orchestra on the staircase, and thus was our *Tribschen* consecrated forever." (*Tribschen* was the name of the house on Lake Lucerne in Switzerland where Wagner lived for six years. Here he completed *Die Meistersinger* and *Siegfried* and composed most of *Götterdämmerung*.)

It was Cosima's thirty-third birthday that Wagner produced this intensely private family treasure. (It only became public seven years later when Wagner reluctantly sold it to Schott in lieu of six orchestral pieces of overture size. The advance of ten thousand florins was desperately needed to help finance *Wahnfried*, his home in Bayreuth.)

The theme was inspired by Cosima's visit to Starnberg in October of 1864, and it also appears in the third act of *Siegfried*. There is a lullaby theme that was written in 1868 for Eva (Cosima's daughter by Wagner, born when she was still supposedly the wife of Hans von Bülow). However, it was in celebration of their son Siegfried's birth (June 6, 1869) that the *Idyll* was composed. A surprise present for his wife (Cosima and Richard were married on August 25, 1870), the work is a consummate expression of Wagner's most tender human emotions.

Michael Zearott (b. 1937, San Francisco, California) is a conductor, composer, pianist, and music educator. He spent most of his early years in the Los Angeles area and was the first student to earn a Ph.D. in composition at the University of California, Los Angeles. His piano background includes work with Alexander Karnbach, Bernard Comsky, Gyorgy Sandor, Leo Smit, and Jakob Gimpel. Accompanying study was with Emanuel Bay and Gwendolyn Kodolfsky. Zearott has been a pianist for the Heifetz Master Class and toured the United States with the chorales of Roger Wagner and Robert Shaw.

Zearott is active as a composer with a large list of compositions in all media. He has transcribed several works for the Verdehr Trio. He has co-authored, with Annette Klover, a book on basic music theory called *MUSIC X 12*.

As a First Prize, Gold Medal winner of the Dmitri Mitropoulos International Conducting Competition, Zearott conducted the New York Philharmonic in Lincoln Center. He made his European debut on the special series *Les Concerts du Palais Princier* in Monaco on invitation of Prince Rainier. He has been Assistant Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony, Associate Conductor of *l'Orchestre National de Monte Carlo*, Music Director of the Ojai Festival and the Los Angeles Guild Opera. He frequently appears as a guest conductor for major orchestras in the United States and Europe.

Zearott has been a faculty member of the University of California, Los Angeles; California State University, Los Angeles and Long Beach; and Marymount College. He was Conductor-in-Residence and Visiting Professor at Michigan State University, and is currently on the faculty at Lewis-Clark State College.