

To the Directors of the Bayreuth Festspiele.

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My name is Olav Anton Thommessen. I am a composer, and have been a professor of composition at the Norwegian State Academy of Music for 40 years.

After a ten year wait for tickets, I attended this year's performance of the Ring-Cycle. What I saw had a highly tentative connection with the great work that Richard Wagner bequeathed to you.

Musicians have for many years always sought to interpret a work according to the supposed desires of the composer. Kirill Petrenko's performance was exemplary in this respect. Some stage-directors today however seem to feel no such compunction. What we were shown appeared to be the projection of a profoundly anti-musical and resentful director's private agenda, and his preoccupation with an unhappy and traumatic upbringing in East-Germany. This is not what we paid to see. This "interpretation" bore no relationship whatsoever with the vision that Wagner left to posterity.

I feel that this year's production was a swindle, and that the directors of the festival could be accused of false advertising by claiming that this presentation was supposed to be of Wagner's Ring. That the directorship has not undertaken a quality-control over the end result, and forced through either a cancellation or a modification of the director's "concept" is deeply disturbing and depressing.

I first attended the Bayreuth Festspiel in 1979, when I saw the Boulez/Chereau Ring. Although this production was then considered provocative, it would be difficult to say that Wagner's ideas were not incorporated into this great presentation. I also attended the Tancred Dorst Ring-Cycle and found it to be reasonably well produced. However, my sister attended the Jürgen Flimm Ring and found it absurd and full of Germanic "Regisseur-theater" ticks.

It has been argued that the Castorf-Ring, like the one by Boulez and Chereau, will come to be accepted given time. To this, I say that a production that systematically sabotages the great moments of the work with falling potatoes, copulating crocodiles, an eaten forest-bird, etc., and is presented with an apallingly bad lighting-design where the viewer has to hunt out the protagonists in the shadows, moreover the superimposition of banal, infantile americanised soap-opera scenarios on to Wagner's librettos have no place on this great stage, and should certainly not be presented for the three coming seasons.

I strongly urge you to withdraw this vulgar and meaningless production immediately. To present it for three more years is to swindle your audience, creating no incentive for future visits to a house that can now only boast of a fabulous acoustic.

Olav Anton Thommessen