

# Wagner's 'Bridal Chorus' from *Lohengrin* and its Use as a Wedding March

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**Abstract** The 'Bridal Chorus' of Wagner's 1850 opera *Lohengrin* is one of the most recognizable pieces of music in the world. This article explores how it became so inextricably associated with wedding ceremonies – real ones, or on stage and in film. Furthered by its use at several British royal weddings the music was especially popular at wedding ceremonies in Britain and the USA. Notwithstanding that the chorus was usually performed in an instrumental arrangement, its attractiveness as wedding music was strengthened by various new English texts, its popular title of 'Here comes the Bride' deriving from a 1915 silent film. On a different level, this study contextualizes and evaluates the long-lasting criticism of the use of Wagner's 'Bridal Chorus' at wedding ceremonies. Proportional to the decline in its actual use, this criticism has now mostly gone; yet, the 'Bridal Chorus' remains as the archetypal music to represent the arrival of the bride.

There are very few pieces of music that evoke in the listener instant associations of a certain occasion or concept – and that on a global, international level. Most often these are well-known national anthems (such as the *Marseillaise*), a particularly famous Christmas carol (such as 'Silent Night'), or the universally popular song 'Happy Birthday' – or, at the other end of the spectrum, Chopin's haunting funeral march. Pride of place among such pieces must certainly be given to two 'wedding marches': the 'Wedding March' from Felix Mendelssohn's 1842 incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (op. 61), and Richard Wagner's 'Bridal Chorus' from his 1850 opera *Lohengrin*. The history of how Mendelssohn's march came to be used at actual weddings has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The history of Wagner's piece at actual, real-world weddings, however, has so far not been explored. While much of its early performance history at weddings is shrouded in mystery, some details could be found that provide interesting information. A discussion of the music's use from its earliest known appearance at weddings up to the later twentieth century also points to other intriguing issues for discussion – such as the question of exactly when, at one point in wedding ceremonies, the music was performed; or how it was performed and also how it was received and was met with criticism.

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthias Range, 'Mendelssohn's Wedding March at Weddings', *Musical Times*, 160/1947 (Summer 2019), 97–112.

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Before indulging in the nuptial history of the music, an early *à propos* about terminology may be helpful. In its original context in the opera *Lohengrin*, Wagner's Bridal Chorus is a vocal piece sung by the choir: nevertheless, it is quite legitimate to call it a 'bridal march' or even 'wedding march'; references to it as a 'march' are numerous and, as will be seen, Wagner himself reportedly applied the German appellation 'Hochzeitsmarsch' ('wedding march') to the piece. The following uses either the title 'Bridal Chorus' or 'Bridal March' in order to avoid confusion with Mendelssohn's Wedding March.

### **Wagner's march at weddings**

The use of Wagner's Bridal Chorus at actual wedding ceremonies appears to have been particularly popular in the English-speaking world. Indeed, as with Mendelssohn's Wedding March, the association of Wagner's piece with a 'real' wedding, as opposed to a stage wedding, appears to have been first prominent in Britain; and, as for the Mendelssohn, this association was probably furthered through the music's use at royal weddings. Beginning with Queen Victoria's own wedding in 1840, royal weddings were high-profile events that received burgeoning public attention, were discussed in more and more publications, and were thus increasingly influential on other weddings throughout the country – and eventually on an international scale.

Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* premiered in Weimar in August 1850, conducted by Wagner's friend Franz Liszt, and in a series of eight concerts in London between March and June 1855 Wagner himself conducted excerpts from the opera; these included the Bridal Chorus, under the title 'Epithalamium'.<sup>2</sup> Regarding its use at actual weddings, it has been stated that Wagner's music served as a bridal march at the 1858 wedding of Princess Victoria to Prince Frederick of Prussia, and this idea has been perpetrated in several publications and is widely cited on the internet.<sup>3</sup> However, there is clear evidence that the bride actually entered to a march by Handel: Sir George Smart, the senior organist of the Chapel Royal who was responsible for the music at the ceremony, recorded 'At 25 M. to 1 \_ the Bride's Procession entered the Chapel, / the Band playing the March in "Judas Macc:" \_ with the Side Drums'.<sup>4</sup> There is no indication that Wagner's march was included at the wedding ceremony in the chapel; all that is confirmed is that it was heard at a special concert at Buckingham Palace. On the wedding day, the queen 'gave a State Concert in the evening in the new Ball and

<sup>2</sup> See the reviews cited in [note 95](#).

<sup>3</sup> The clear pronouncement of this idea seems to go back to Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 212: 'As she walked to the altar, the organist played the Bridal Chorus from Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*.'

<sup>4</sup> Much of Smart's material on this wedding is collected in British Library, London, Add. MS 41777; this remark is to be found on fol. 311<sup>v</sup>. The individual entrance marches are also named in the printed list of music (fol. 319<sup>v</sup>). For the music at this and the other royal weddings discussed in this article (as well as for more details on sources) see the author's two studies *British Royal Weddings: From the Stuarts to the Early Twentieth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022) and *British Royal Weddings: The House of Windsor* (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

Concert-room' with an orchestra of 'nearly 80 in number' and a choir of 'nearly 100 voices'.<sup>5</sup> This concert was attended by the newly wed Prince and Princess of Prussia and 'invitations amounted to about eight hundred'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, this concert was an important occasion – in numbers easily surpassing the wedding service itself that had taken place in the limited space of the Chapel Royal. Rather than the earlier wedding service, it was this concert that featured Wagner's Bridal Chorus, as part of a selection from *Lohengrin*.<sup>7</sup> In all probability it was sung by the choir: Michael Budds has highlighted the fact that Thomas Oliphant had provided special texts for Wagner's pieces.<sup>8</sup> In 1947, Percy Scholes observed that Mendelssohn's Wedding March had been performed at the end of the 1858 wedding service, thus giving 'royal sanction [...] to a wedding practice that has happily been maintained ever since', and in regards to the concert, the 'entertainment on the wedding evening', he pointed out:

Here was initiated another British musical wedding custom that still survives – the association with such events of the Wagner Wedding March.<sup>9</sup>

Ever since, the performance of Wagner's Bridal Chorus at the 1858 wedding concert has been understood as the origin of the link between this music and an actual wedding.<sup>10</sup> The incorrect reading that Wagner's march was at this wedding first used as a bridal march may have its origins in a misunderstanding of Scholes's observation.

A few years after the Princess Royal's wedding, Wagner's Bridal Chorus was heard in London in connection with the next major royal wedding. In June 1863, W. G. Cusins conducted a public benefit concert that included 'the bridal-music' from *Lohengrin*, referring to 'a march and chorus with orchestral accompaniments'.<sup>11</sup> A review of the concert explained that this choice

was partly suggested, no doubt, by a reference to the great event of the season, which our entertainers seem loyally determined that we shall not forget – the marriage of the Prince of Wales.

Notwithstanding the inclusion of the music at the 1858 wedding concert, its use in 1863 – following the wedding of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) and Princess Alexandra of Denmark in March – indicates that an association between the Bridal

<sup>5</sup> 'The Ceremony and Dresses at the Royal Nuptials', *London Journal, and Weekly Record of Literature, Science, and Art*, 27/680 (6 March 1858), pp. 5–6 (p. 6). For this concert see also 'Concert at Buckingham Palace', *Musical World*, 36 (1858), 75–76.

<sup>6</sup> 'Ceremony and Dresses', p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> For the full programme see 'Concert at Buckingham Palace', p. 76, and for copies of the actual programme used see Windsor Castle, Royal Archives, RA F&V/WED/1858/VICPSR. See also 'The Marriage of the Princess Royal', *The Times*, 26 January 1858, pp. 7–9 (p. 8); and 'The Marriage of the Princess Royal', Supplement to *Illustrated London News*, 30 January 1858, pp. 117–28 (pp. 122–23).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Joe Budds, 'Music at the Court of Queen Victoria: A Study of Music in the Life of the Queen and her Participation in the Musical Life of her Time', 3 vols (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1987), I, p. 450, who refers to 'Marriage of the Princess Royal', *The Times*, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Percy Scholes, *The Mirror of Music, 1844–1944: A Century of Musical Life in Britain as Reflected in the Pages of the Musical Times*, 2 vols (London: Novello, 1947), II, p. 857.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Budds, 'Music at the Court of Queen Victoria', I, p. 452.

<sup>11</sup> For this and the following quotation see 'Recent Concerts. – Wagner's "Lohengrin," &c.', *Reader*, 13 June 1863, p. 583.

Chorus and real-world weddings was understood, appreciated and sustained. All the same, the earliest evidence that could be traced for the inclusion of Wagner's march at an actual wedding ceremony seems to stem from only 1875. This is found in an article on 'Marriage Music' by T. Percy M. Betts, written on the occasion of the wedding of Princess Beatrice to Prince Henry of Battenberg in July 1885 and published in the special wedding issue of the popular magazine *The Graphic*. Betts observed:

Richard Wagner wrote no music for weddings. But since the marriage of Madame Edith Wynne at the Chapel Royal, Savoy, and that of Madame Albani at the Warwick Street Chapel, the wedding music from *Lohengrin* is frequently played as the bride enters the church [*sic*].<sup>12</sup>

The weddings of Wynne and Albani mentioned by Betts took place in 1875 and 1878, respectively. His statement regarding the use of Wagner's music at these weddings deserves some scrutiny. Edith Wynne was a Welsh operatic soprano and concert singer and married the Cambridge-educated Armenian barrister Aviet Agabeg in November 1875 at the Queen's Chapel at the Savoy, which was usually called 'the Chapel Royal, Savoy' in publications throughout the nineteenth century. There are numerous reports of this wedding and these agree that the bride entered to a hymn sung by the choir preceding her.<sup>13</sup> The reports do not, however, mention Wagner's Bridal March and it cannot be known whether it was included in the ceremony at all.

Yet, even though Wynne's 1875 wedding turns out to be inconclusive as a starting point of the use of Wagner's march at weddings, the earliest known report referring to such a use nevertheless dates from the same year. For the wedding of James Shaw, general superintendent of the London and North-Western Railway Company, to a Mrs Pickup at the Church of St John the Divine, Fairfield, near Liverpool, in early September 1875, one report detailed that 'during the signing of the registry and as the party was leaving', the organist 'Mr. W.H. Jude, organist of the Blue Coat Hospital [...] played "Faithful and True" (Wagner) and "The Wedding March" (Mendelssohn).'<sup>14</sup> 'Faithful and True' refers to the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin*, as in the score of the whole opera in English translation published by Novello in July 1872.<sup>15</sup> Within a year, the chorus on its own had been published under this title in the

<sup>12</sup> T. Percy M. Betts, 'Marriage Music', *The Graphic*, special wedding issue, 27 July 1885, pp. 20–21 (p. 21).

<sup>13</sup> See 'Marriage of Miss Edith Wynne', *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser*, 20 November 1875, p. 8: 'From our own Correspondent'; [untitled notice], *Musical Standard*, vol. IX (new series), 590 (20 November 1875), 337; 'Marriage of Miss Edith Wynne', *Cardiff Times*, 20 November 1875, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> 'Marriage of Mr. James Shaw', *Liverpool Mercury*, 10 September 1875, p. 3. A report of this wedding, taken from local papers, was also included in *Musical Standard*, vol. IX (new series), 581 (18 September 1875), p. 202 (under 'Notes').

<sup>15</sup> Richard Wagner, *Lohengrin*, Octavo Edition of Operas, volume xxvii (London: Novello, 1872). The publication date of July 1872 is confirmed by the announcement of its having been published 'during the last month' in *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 15/354 (1 August 1872), p. 577. The opera edition was edited by Berthold Tours with an English translation by Natalia Macfarren. In November 1872, another advertisement announced the recent publication of the whole opera with

series of Novello's Opera Choruses.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the Shaw/Pickup wedding in Fairfield was not a society event, and that it took place before the Wynne/Agabeg wedding, indicates that knowledge of the music had by then become relatively widespread – and this in turn may imply that Wagner's piece had been used at weddings some time prior to September 1875.

In conclusion then, while Betts's statement about the Wynne wedding seems unsubstantiated, it is nevertheless correct that Wagner's Bridal Chorus/March appeared at actual weddings no later than 1875. Thus, although it had been heard at least in concerts twenty years earlier – if not also at weddings – and while it had been published as part of the opera and also separately a few years earlier, Wagner's Bridal March seems to have been chosen for wedding ceremonies only after the first British performance of *Lohengrin* in its entirety in May 1875, when the opera was performed at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in the Italian translation by Salvatore de C. Marchesi.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the march's use at the Shaw/Pickup wedding in Fairfield a few months later indicates that the music had, relatively quickly, become more widely known.

The other wedding referred to by Betts is that of the Canadian-born Dame Emma Albani, another opera soprano. She married Ernest Gye, director of the Royal Italian Opera, on 6 August 1878 at the Catholic Chapel in Warwick Street, London. The reports of the wedding refer to it as 'strictly private' or 'entirely private' and while this characterization does, of course, not preclude the performance of any music, none is mentioned – let alone any specific piece.<sup>18</sup> All the same, it is an intriguing side-note that in autumn 1874 Albani had actually sung Elsa in *Lohengrin* on a tour in the USA and it was Albani who had sung Elsa in the London premiere of the opera in 1875.<sup>19</sup> The use of the *Lohengrin* Bridal Chorus at her own wedding, if it had been included, would thus have been neatly appropriate. In any case, whether it was or was not included at Albani's wedding in 1878, as will be seen in the following, after 1875 Wagner's Bridal Chorus was mentioned more and more in reports of weddings: therefore, Betts's observation that it had been 'frequently played' since the time of these two weddings seems plausible and credible.

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German, Italian, and English text by Boosey & Co. (seemingly in the Royal Edition of Operas series). See *Illustrated London News*, 16 November 1872, p. 478 (under 'Musical Publications').

<sup>16</sup> See Richard Wagner, *Faithful and True We Lead Ye Forth*, Novello's Opera Choruses no. 48 (London: Novello & Co, [n.d.]). This single edition must have been available at the latest in 1873, when *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 16/364 (June 1873), p. 126, listed volumes 1 to 65.

<sup>17</sup> For details on the 1875 production see, for instance, Paul Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles, 1875–1918* (London: Routledge, 2016; first publ. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 27–28.

<sup>18</sup> For reports see 'From our London Correspondent', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 August 1878, p. 5; and 'Current Foreign Topics', *New York Times*, 10 August 1878, p. 5. See also the short untitled notice in *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 19/427 (September 1878), p. 493.

<sup>19</sup> For Albani's performances as Elsa during her USA tour see, for instance, Michelle Labrèche-Larouche, *Emma Albani: International Star* (Montreal: XYZ Publishing, 2001), pp. 89–90. For her singing in the London premiere see Massimo Zicari, *Verdi in Victorian London* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), p. 249, who refers to *The Times* of 31 March 1875 (p. 8).

## The position of Wagner's Bridal March

Wagner's Bridal March is today indisputably linked to the entrance of the bride. Yet, the above-cited probably earliest reference to its use at a wedding notably recorded that it had been heard towards the end of the ceremony on that occasion. As will be seen in the following discussions, it was to take several decades until the music became strongly associated with the bride's entrance. In this context, another important aspect regarding the position of Wagner's march at weddings was its pairing with Mendelssohn's Wedding March. In relation to the 1858 wedding, Jessica Kerr stated in a conflated summary that 'the Mendelssohn and the Wagner were linked together at this royal wedding, thus founding a tradition which is still with us'.<sup>20</sup> Although Wagner's piece at this wedding had not accompanied the bride's entrance and was heard only in the evening concert, this wedding yet has the distinction of being one of the earliest, if not *the* earliest, to feature both well-known wedding marches at some point – for this was also the first prominent wedding to feature Mendelssohn's Wedding March, which accompanied the newlyweds' procession at the end of the service, ultimately kick-starting its popularity.<sup>21</sup> Given the later international fame of both marches, this wedding was – musically speaking – one of the most notable, and perhaps influential weddings ever.

In 1876, one year after the earliest known mention of the Bridal March being used at an actual wedding, a report about a wedding at All Saints' Church, Childwall, near Liverpool, noted that, 'Before and at the arrival of the bridal party a choice selection of music was played by Mr. F. H. Burstall, organist of Childwall parish church', with the 'bridal chorus from "Lohengrin" (Wagner)' among the 'principal numbers' and with Mendelssohn's Wedding March being played 'As the party left the church'.<sup>22</sup> With the wording being unclear it is possible that Wagner's piece accompanied the bride's entrance. In any case, there is unequivocal mentioning of Wagner's march as having accompanied the bride's procession in the next year. In late August 1877, Sidney Herbert M.P. and Lady Beatrix Lambton married at St George's Church, Hanover Square, London; and for the entrance of the bride, a report of the wedding noted specifically:

As the bridal party passed the communion table the organist (Mr. W. Pinney) played Wagner's 'Bridal March'.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding the curious reference to the 'communion table', which must have stood more in the middle of the church, this clearly refers to the entrance procession of the bride: for the end of the ceremony, when the couple went into the vestry to sign the register, the report mentions 'the organ pealing forth Handel's march in *Scipio*' and for

<sup>20</sup> Jessica M. Kerr, 'English Wedding Music', *Musical Times*, 106/1463 (January 1965), 53–55 (p. 53). Kerr had previously correctly observed that Mendelssohn's march had been played as the recessional at the ceremony and Wagner's march 'at the State Ball [*recte* 'concert'] the same evening'.

<sup>21</sup> See Range, 'Mendelssohn's Wedding March', p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> 'Marriage of Mr. E. P. Bates and Miss C. E. Graves', *Liverpool Mercury*, 21 April 1876, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> 'Marriage of the Hon Sidney Herbert M.P., and Lady Beatrix Lambton', *Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle*, 1 September 1877, p. 3.

the wedding party's leaving it notes that 'the organist played Mendelssohn's well-known "Wedding March".'

The choice of Wagner's piece for the bride's procession stands in contrast to its original context and musically creates an inverted chronology. As is well known, in Wagner's opera, the Bridal Chorus comes at the beginning of Act III, only after the wedding which is implied (but not actually shown) at the end of Act II; thus the music accompanies the newly wed couple going forth from the ceremony, first to the bridal chamber and ultimately to their life together. This is also reflected in the title 'Epithalamium' for the chorus: this is defined as a 'nuptial song or poem in praise of the bride and bridegroom, and praying for their prosperity'.<sup>24</sup> In Wagner's opera, the Bridal Chorus is obviously not an instrumental piece but sung by the choir, and its original German text refers explicitly to the couple's going away and towards their life together:

Treulich geführt ziehet dahin, wo euch der Segen  
der Liebe bewahrt! [...] Siegreicher Mut, Minne  
so rein eint euch in Treue zum seligsten Paar.

Faithfully guided, move thither where the  
blessing of love shall preserve you! [...]   
Victorious courage, love so pure, unites you in  
faithfulness to be the most blessed couple.

Whereas in modern English both 'move' and the 'you' to be preserved are grammatically ambiguous, the German imperative 'ziehet' is clearly addressed to more than one person, as is the 'euch', or 'you'. Moreover, with a relatively open reference to the impending pleasures of the wedding night, the middle section of the text (not quoted above) mentions that the couple has escaped from the noise of the feast ('Rauschen des Festes seid nun entronnen') and that the 'fragranced room, decorated for love' will receive them ('Duftender Raum, zur Liebe geschmückt, nehm' euch nun auf'). Altogether, therefore, with its original text, place and context in the opera, this piece does not make sense as an accompaniment for the entrance of the bride.

At this point, it may be worth remembering that Wagner had actually written music for the bridal procession in *Lohengrin*: 'Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral' in Act II, scene 4. This seems to have been used at least at some weddings. For instance, for a wedding in Exeter Cathedral in 1890, it was reported that the organist

played the 'Nuptial March' (Guilmant) and the 'Wedding March' (Wagner), and after the service the 'Wedding March' (Mendelssohn) and the 'Bridal Chorus' (Wagner).<sup>25</sup>

The account's distinction between Wagner's 'Wedding March' and his 'Bridal Chorus' indicates that these were two different pieces – with the earlier 'March' plausibly referring to the processional from the opera. Since the account also detailed that the bride entered to a 'processional hymn', the listed 'Wedding March' by Wagner would

<sup>24</sup> For this title see notes 2 and 82; for the definition, see *OED Online*, Oxford University Press <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/63589/>> [accessed 14 May 2021].

<sup>25</sup> 'Wedding of Miss Ellis at the Exeter Cathedral', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 24 September 1890, p. 6.

probably have been played before her entrance, not during her procession down the aisle. In any case, the music of Elsa's procession is not that straightforwardly melodious and this march does not seem to have been used at many weddings.

Overall, it was the Bridal Chorus that became more and more used at weddings and it relatively early achieved the ultimate seal of approval when it was used to accompany the bride's entrance at the most prominent weddings in the country. For the 1885 wedding of Queen Victoria's youngest child Princess Beatrice, the programme of music in the order of service includes the 'BRIDAL MARCH' by Wagner for the bride's entrance.<sup>26</sup> Reports of this wedding confirm incontrovertibly that the music actually accompanied the bride's procession down the aisle:

At ten minutes past one the head of the procession came in sight, and at the same time the organ pealed forth the glorious burst of harmony contained in the first cadence of Wagner's famous Bridal March.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, Queen Victoria herself, who led the bride to the altar, recorded: 'Wagner's lovely "Braut Chor" from Lohengrin was beautifully played on the organ by Mr Parratt, as we came into the Church.'<sup>28</sup> It is to be noted that the cited report referred to it as the 'famous' march, indicating that it was at least generally well known, if not specifically popular at weddings. Another report of the wedding in the *Morning Post* explained that 'the musical part of the service [...] had been specially selected by the Princess Beatrice'.<sup>29</sup> However, a week later, *The Graphic* included a short notice on the music at the wedding, arguing decidedly that such information was needed 'the more especially as some of the reports seem to be hopelessly mixed on the subject'.<sup>30</sup> It explained that the music of the service 'was, as is customary, left to the choice of the organist at St. George's Chapel, Windsor, whose choir was in attendance' – and thus that Walter Parratt had chosen the music. This appears to be confirmed by a source from the time of the next royal wedding, that of Princess Louise of Wales in 1889: in a letter to Spencer Ponsonby-Fane, Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the Dean of Windsor referred back to Princess Beatrice's wedding and its music and specifically mentioned 'the Choice then made by Mr Parratt & approved', indicating that Parratt had chosen the music.<sup>31</sup> As with most of the other weddings discussed in this article, however, the reasons for the choice of Wagner's piece do not seem to be known. If it was indeed chosen by Parratt, then one could assume that it was not chosen

<sup>26</sup> For copies of the order of service see, for instance, National Archives, Kew, London, Records of the Lord Chamberlain and other officers of the Royal Household (henceforth Lna), LC 2/99.

<sup>27</sup> 'The Marriage of Princess Beatrice', *Western Daily Press*, 8467, 24 July 1885, p. 8. The same in, for instance, 'The Marriage of Princess Beatrice', *York Herald*, 10657, 25 July 1885, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Queen Victoria's Journals*, available online as both photographs and transcriptions at <<https://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/>> [accessed 24 May 2022], entry for 23 July 1885 (Princess Beatrice's copy). She used the German term 'Braut Chor' for the Bridal Chorus.

<sup>29</sup> 'The Royal Marriage', *Morning Post*, 24 July 1885, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> 'Music', *The Graphic*, 818, 1 August 1885, p. 123, under 'THE ROYAL MARRIAGE'.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Randall Davidson to Ponsonby-Fane, 8 July 1889, Records of the Lord Chamberlain, LC 2/120.



merely for its popularity but also for its musical merits. All the same, whether it was chosen by Princess Beatrice herself or not, the use of this music at this wedding would confirm that it was a valid choice in the highest ranks of society.

Wagner's Bridal March prominently accompanied the bride's procession at several subsequent royal weddings, thus possibly contributing to its reputation and inspiring the choices at many other weddings. For the wedding of Princess Louise of Wales and Alexander Duff, 6th Earl of Fife, at the private chapel in Buckingham Palace in July 1889, the *Illustrated London News* recorded that 'as the well-known music of Wagner's March from "Lohengrin" came from the organ the bride entered on the arm of the Prince of Wales'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, *The Times* detailed that, during the bride's entrance, 'Mr Jekyll, at the organ, played a march from *Lohengrin*'.<sup>33</sup>

Four years later, at the wedding of Prince George of Wales and Princess May of Teck (later George V and Queen Mary), at the Chapel Royal in 1893, the printed ceremonial scheduled that 'Wagner's Bridal March from Lohengrin will be played on the Organ', during the bride's entrance, and this was confirmed in the reports.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the march had already accompanied her procession through the state rooms on the way to the chapel.<sup>35</sup> At this wedding, it was thus doubly linked with the bride's procession – yet, not exclusively, as will be seen later.

Finally, in 1896, at the wedding of Princess Maud of Wales to Prince Charles of Denmark (later Haakon VII of Norway) at the private chapel in Buckingham Palace, the Bridal Chorus accompanied the bride's procession through the temporary corridor erected on the palace terrace.<sup>36</sup> Once she reached the chapel, however, the *Illustrated London News* noted that 'the band of the Grenadier Guards, which had been playing the Bridal Chorus from "Lohengrin" in the corridor, was hushed'.<sup>37</sup> *The Times* recorded that the band's music 'ceased, and the next thing that was heard in the corridor was the opening hymn, "O Paradise," sung as the bride entered the chapel'.<sup>38</sup> Even though the bride did not actually walk down the aisle to Wagner's march but to a hymn, Wagner's piece had still accompanied her procession before the hymn, during

<sup>32</sup> 'The Royal Wedding', *Illustrated London News*, 3 August 1889, p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Royal Wedding', *The Times*, 29 July 1889, p. 10. See also 'The Royal Wedding at Buckingham Palace', *Observer*, 28 July 1889, p. 5 ['Arrival at the Palace'/second account].

<sup>34</sup> *Ceremonial to be Observed at the Marriage of His Royal Highness George Frederick Ernest Albert, Duke of York [...] with Her Serene Highness The Princess Victoria Mary [...] of Teck* (London, 1893; printed copy in Lna LC 2/131), here p. 11; and see 'The Royal Wedding', *The Scotsman*, 7 July 1893, p. 5; and 'The Royal Wedding', *Illustrated London News*, 15 July 1893, pp. 70–71 (p. 70).

<sup>35</sup> See the music list in 'Marriage of HRH The Duke of York. / July 6<sup>th</sup> 1893. / Arrangements for the Band of the / Grenadier Guards under the Direction / of Lieut: Godfrey.', 'Copy given to M.<sup>r</sup> Godfrey. 3<sup>rd</sup> July '93', letter head of Lord Chamberlain's Office, Lna LC 2/128. This document is included in two copies.

<sup>36</sup> This and the following 'The Royal Wedding', *The Times*, 23 July 1896, pp. 5–6 (p. 6). See also *Ceremonial Observed at the Marriage of Her Royal Highness The Princess Maud [...] with His Royal Highness The Prince Christian [...] of Denmark* (London: 1896; printed copy in Records of the Lord Chamberlain, LC 2/134), here p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Marriage of Princess Maud of Wales and Prince Charles of Denmark at Buckingham Palace', *Illustrated London News: Royal Wedding Number*, 29 July 1896, pp. 2–8 (p. 4).

<sup>38</sup> 'The Royal Wedding', *The Times*, 23 July 1896, pp. 5–6 (p. 6).

her extended way to the altar. Nevertheless, after this wedding, Wagner's march, for unknown reasons, all but disappeared from royal wedding ceremonies – although, as will be seen, it had at least a brief, isolated – but notable – return in 1934.

In parallel with, and possibly in imitation of royal weddings, Wagner's Bridal Chorus was used for the bride's entrance also at other, non-royal weddings throughout the country. For instance, shortly after the wedding of Princess Beatrice, for a wedding in Ipswich in early August 1885, it was reported that

in the interval before the arrival of the bride Mr. Edwin Nunn played 'With Verdure Clad,' from the *Creation*, with fine effect on the grand old organ; followed, when the wedding party were grouped in the aisle, by 'The Bridal March' (*Wagner*).<sup>39</sup>

In all likelihood, this refers to the Bridal Chorus and it may have accompanied the bride's procession. Four years later, not long after the 1889 royal wedding, for a wedding in the Gloucestershire village of Woodchester in November 1889, a local paper reported "The organist played the "Bridal Chorus," by Wagner, and Mendelssohn's "Wedding March".<sup>40</sup> This probably referred to the music at either end of the ceremony and thus to the Wagner accompanying the bride.

However, having observed the 'clash' between the original context of Wagner's march and its use for a bridal procession, it is interesting to note that its exact position in the ceremony was not clearly 'established' for quite some time. Even though Wagner's march prominently accompanied the arrival of the bride at royal weddings in 1885, 1889 and 1893 (and to some extent in 1896), there are numerous reports from before and around these dates of non-royal weddings at which Wagner's march was played towards the end of the ceremony. It seems to have been popular at the time to have the Wagner and Mendelssohn marches follow each other in the programme of music. For instance, as seen above, at the 1875 wedding in Fairfield, Wagner's piece was played during the signing of the register while Mendelssohn's Wedding March was played 'as the party was leaving'.<sup>41</sup> A couple of years later, in September 1877, Wagner's 'Wedding Music from "Lohengrin"' was included in the list of music for a wedding in the Thanet District.<sup>42</sup> Wagner's march was placed just before Mendelssohn's Wedding March, which is the last piece on the list – and since the music for the bride's entrance appears to have been George Elvey's 'March composed for the Wedding of the Princess Louise', Wagner's piece may therefore again have

<sup>39</sup> 'The Marriage of Miss Adela Lucy Cobbold at Ipswich', *Ipswich Journal*, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> 'District News', *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 9 November 1889, p. 2, reporting on the wedding of 'Mr Edward Metcalfe, youngest son of the late Mr Francis Metcalfe, of Metcalfe park, county Kildare, to Catherine Maud, elder daughter of the late Henry D. Cholmeley (captain 27th Regiment), of The Priory, Woodchester'.

<sup>41</sup> See note 14.

<sup>42</sup> 'Marriage of Miss Wotton', *Thanet Advertiser*, 15 September 1877, p. 3, reporting on the wedding of 'Mr. James B. Walford, solicitor, of Abergavenny, but formerly of Ramsgate, with Lizzie, eldest daughter of our respected townsman Mr. Thomas Wotton (of the well-known firm of Tomson and Wotton), of Claremont, The Vale.' The wedding took place 'at Christ Church on Tuesday morning last [11 September]', probably referring to the church of that name in Ramsgate. The account also noted that 'Dr. Prior (organist of St. Mary's), assisted by his son, Mr. G. N. S. Prior, R.A.M., presided at the organ'.

accompanied the couple's signing of the register before leaving the church. In the next year, both Wagner's and Mendelssohn's marches were listed among the music at the wedding of Viscount Grimston, eldest son of the Earl of Verulam, to Mrs Margaret Frances Mackintosh on 30 April 1878 at St George's, Hanover Square, and the report's wording might indicate that they were played for the bride's entrance and the newly-weds' departure, respectively.<sup>43</sup>

In 1884, reports of a wedding in Worcestershire confirm that both Wagner's Bridal March and Mendelssohn's Wedding March were played 'After the ceremony'.<sup>44</sup> Later in the same year, at the wedding of a couple from Somerset in South Kensington, Wagner's march was again part of the music that the organist played while the couple was away in the vestry signing the certificates.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, for a wedding in Warwick in July 1894, it was reported that

At the conclusion of the ceremony the Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin, by Wagner, and Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" were played on the organ, and the bells of All Saints' rang joyful peals.<sup>46</sup>

The same grouping of these two pieces at the end of the ceremony was reported for a local wedding by the *Sheffield Independent* in 1899.<sup>47</sup>

Some more examples from local newspapers from the first three decades of the twentieth century illustrate the popularity and varying positioning of the marches:

- In early February 1904, at a wedding in Gloucester Cathedral, Wagner's Bridal March was played during the signing of the register, before Mendelssohn's Wedding March.<sup>48</sup>
- About two weeks later, the Duke of Norfolk married Gwendolen Maxwell at Everingham in Yorkshire and a report recorded: 'As the bride and bridegroom left the chapel the organist played the "Wedding March" from "Lohengrin" – seemingly in favour of the Mendelssohn.'<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 'Fashionable Wedding', *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 1 May 1878, p. 3: 'During the ceremony Mr. W. Pinney, Mus. B. Oxon, the organist, played Mendelssohn's prelude, the "Bridal March," from Wagner, the "March in Scipio," and the "Wedding March."'

<sup>44</sup> 'Marriage of Mr. C. Couchman and Miss F. C. Thursfield', *Berrows Worcester Journal*, 31 May 1884, p. 5; and 'Marriage of Mr. C. Couchman and Miss Florence C. Thursfield', *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 31 May 1884, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> 'Marriage of Mr. S. E. Butler and Miss Florence S. Grosvenor', *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 18 December 1884, p. 5: 'At the conclusion of the ceremony the union of the happy couple was announced by the performance of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and the party proceeded to the vestry for the purpose of signing the necessary certificates. The organist filled the interval by playing, in his finished style, "Notturmo," from Mendelssohn's "Midsummer Night's Dream," and wedding music [*sic*] "Lohengrin" (Wagner), and as the wedding party emerged from the vestry the organist glided almost imperceptibly into the "Wedding March," which he continued playing until the party left the church.'

<sup>46</sup> 'Marriage of Miss M. E. Hassall to Mr. E. C. Windle', *Leamington Spa Courier*, 21 July 1894, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> 'Local Weddings: Mr. Benjamin Hind and Miss Amy Burgon', *Sheffield Independent*, 22 June 1899, p. 6, lists "'Bridal Chorus" (Wagner), "Wedding March" (Mendelssohn)' for 'after the service'.

<sup>48</sup> 'Wedding in Gloucester Cathedral: Bateman-Champain-Arbuthnot', *Gloucester Citizen*, 3 February 1904, p. 4: 'Mr. A. Herbert Brewer accompanied the service throughout, and while the register was being signed played the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin" (Wagner) and Mendelssohn's "Wedding March."'

<sup>49</sup> 'The World's News/The Royal Wedding', *Illustrated London News*, 20 February 1904, p. 257.

- In 1906, Wagner's Chorus was played on the organ at a wedding at Northgate Wesleyan Church at Gloucester, in the first half of the ceremony – presumably during the bride's entrance.<sup>50</sup>
- In 1923, at another Gloucester wedding, Wagner's Chorus was again played on the organ during the signing of the register.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, overall, there is ample evidence that Wagner's piece was used at weddings at least from the third quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, and these were weddings of a wide cross-section of society. While there are various examples of it accompanying the bride's entrance, its use in this position was not yet fully established. Although at the actual ceremonies of royal weddings Wagner's Bridal March, for unknown reasons, seems to have disappeared before the turn of the century, in 1934 the music returned in some form to a royal wedding: before the wedding of Prince George, Duke of Kent, and Princess Marina of Greece, *The Times* reported:

Princess Marina has desired that the march from *Lohengrin* should be added to the original scheme of organ music. This will be played before Mendelssohn's March.<sup>52</sup>

Accordingly, Wagner's march was not used to accompany the bride's entrance: she entered Westminster Abbey to the singing of a hymn, which had been the traditional way for some decades. Rather, the organist incorporated the music of Wagner's chorus in his improvisation following the signing of the register (which itself had been accompanied by a new anthem).<sup>53</sup> Wagner's march was again also heard at the wedding breakfast: as James Wentworth put it in his biography of Princess Marina, 'the Duke led his bride to the top of the table to the bridal march from *Lohengrin*'.<sup>54</sup> Both the princess's wish for its inclusion in the Abbey ceremony and also its performance during the wedding breakfast show, if nothing else, that in the 1930s Wagner's piece was still popular in wedding celebrations, even at the top end of society, and also that it was not yet linked to the bridal procession only.

As regards the juxtaposition of the Wagner and Mendelssohn marches at either end of the ceremony, the above cited report of the 1877 Herbert wedding – which had the Wagner march as possibly being played for the entrance of the bride – noted that the wedding party left the service 'as the organist played Mendelssohn's well-known

<sup>50</sup> 'A Gloucester Wedding: Langley-Smith-Jones', *Gloucester Citizen*, 18 July 1906, p. 5: 'Mr. W. H. Huggins presided at the organ, and played the Swedish Wedding March (Södermann), Elsa's Bridal March from "Lohengrin" (Wagner), "Marche Nuptiale" (Guilmant), and Bridal Chorus from "Lohengrin" (Wagner). During the signing of the register "Andantino" (Lemare) was played, and as the wedding party left the church Mendelssohn's Wedding March.'

<sup>51</sup> 'A Notable Gloucester Wedding: Miss Flora Bruton and Capt. Alan Hall', *Gloucester Citizen*, 17 April 1923, p. 6: 'During the signing of the register Mr. Morgan played the Bridal Chorus from "Lohengrin" (Wagner), and Mendelssohn's Wedding March as the bride and bridegroom left the church.'

<sup>52</sup> 'Wedding Music', *The Times*, 29 November 1934, p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> For details see Range, *British Royal Weddings: The House of Windsor*.

<sup>54</sup> J[ames] Wentworth Day, *H.R.H. Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent: The First Authentic Life Story* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1969), p. 101.

"Wedding March".<sup>55</sup> This, or the 1876 wedding in Childwall which also might have had the Wagner as bridal march, would seem to be the earliest reference to such a clear juxtaposition of the two marches. By 1890, the American music critic Gustav Kobbé in his study of Wagner's life and works could observe about the 'famous bridal chorus' that it 'now forms a companion piece to Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" at nearly every wedding ceremony', cynically concluding that 'there is probably no [other] tune to whose strains so many people are made happy or miserable'.<sup>56</sup>

Overall, as the above reports show, the use of Wagner's (and also Mendelssohn's) march was more wide-spread, even to village churches, and not confined to the more prominent weddings. The music may have been heard at many more weddings than reported, wherever there was an organist able to play it. However, besides the fact that Wagner's march accompanied the bride's entrance at royal weddings between 1885 and 1896, at many other weddings there was yet no strict separation to have Wagner's march for the bride's entrance and Mendelssohn's for the couple's leaving, as there was later to be.

Indeed, based on the known evidence, it appears that – royal weddings apart – up to the early twentieth century (possibly up to the 1920s or 1930s), Wagner's march was used more towards the end of the ceremony. This, incidentally, would have been in its more ordinary place, so to speak – more in accordance with the music's original context in the opera. It is then interesting that these weddings did not follow the scheme of the royal weddings of the time, showing perhaps that these high-profile occasions were not necessarily copied too closely. All the same, the use of Wagner's piece at royal weddings was clearly not restricted to an association with the bride. At the 1893 royal wedding, for instance, both Mendelssohn's and Wagner's wedding marches were also part of 'the musical programme played during the progress of the luncheon', after the service.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, although the Wagner had been played for the bride's entrance, this was clearly not its only association; rather, these strains were generally associated with wedding ceremonies. Nevertheless, the march's association with the bride's procession towards the altar – employed so prominently at the royal weddings of the time – was soon very much strengthened by its link with new words.

### **'Here comes the Bride': New words for Wagner's march – and a new meaning?**

As previously mentioned, it was as early as 1858, at the performance of the selection from *Lohengrin* at the royal wedding concert, that Wagner's chorus was furnished with a newly written special text that created a clear link to the real-world wedding that had taken place.<sup>58</sup> In the following decades, there were various offers of alternative English titles and words to the music, accompanying single editions of the piece that were not

<sup>55</sup> See note 23.

<sup>56</sup> Gustav Kobbé, *Wagner's Life and Works*, 2 vols (New York: G. Schirmer, 1890), I, p. 208.

<sup>57</sup> 'The Royal Wedding', *The Scotsman*, 7 July 1893, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> See note 8.

necessarily linked to a particular wedding. An arrangement for four-part choir and piano by Edward F. Rimbault appeared with a text beginning ‘Hail to the Bride’, and an advertisement in May 1875, the month and year of the opera’s London premiere, described this as intended ‘for Choral Societies’.<sup>59</sup> Notably, such a new text, beginning with an explicit reference to the bride, changed the meaning of the original chorus. It does not seem to be known what caused this re-appropriation of the words to refer exclusively to the bride rather than to the couple: while this could have stemmed from the use of the music during the bride’s entrance at some weddings, it could also have been the other way round – that it was such a re-texted version that eventually inspired the use of the music to accompany the bride’s entrance. In the following years, single editions of the march appear to have been encouraged by the royal weddings of the time – even if these did not include the march, such as the wedding of Prince Leopold in 1882. A fully texted ‘English version’ for three upper voices and piano was published by J. Birkenruth in the next year; then, in 1885 – the year when it was heard at the wedding of Princess Beatrice – Wagner’s chorus was published in a similar edition, also for three upper voices and piano, fully texted, beginning ‘Raise high the Song of Gladness and Joy!’<sup>60</sup> Four years later, when Wagner’s piece was included at the wedding of Princess Louise of Wales, a version for four-part choir and piano was published with a text by A. J. Foxwell, beginning with the curiously ominous words ‘Joy to the brave! Joy to the fair!’<sup>61</sup> In 1924, an arrangement for four-part choir and piano by Albert Ham came with a distinctly more religious text, beginning ‘Father of Heav’n, Spirit of Love! Life-giving Lord, O be Thou their Guide’, and referring to the wedding at Cana as well as the ‘Bridegroom Divine’.<sup>62</sup> None of these alternative titles and words, however, would stick to the tune so inextricably as those introduced in America: ‘Here comes the Bride’. These words, well known today, may well go back to a 1915 silent film with that title produced by Shannon Fife.<sup>63</sup> Notably, the words are merely the title of the film and there is no indication that they were then linked to the music of Wagner’s march. The details of this film still seem to await a closer study but

<sup>59</sup> Richard Wagner, *Hail to the Bride! From Wagner’s “Lohengrin.”*, arr. by Edward F. Rimbault, ‘Chappell’s Penny Operatic Part-Songs’, no. 32 (London: [Chappell & Co., n.d.]). For the advertisement see *Illustrated London News*, 29 May 1875, p. 516. For the first British performance of the opera see [note 17](#).

<sup>60</sup> Richard Wagner, *Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin*, English version by Johanna Birkenruth, ‘Popular Trios for Ladies Voices’, no. 5 (London: Robert Cocks & Co. [1883]); Richard Wagner, *Raise High the Song (Bridal Chorus)*, ‘Hutchings & Romer’s Choruses for Treble Voices’, no. 7 (London: Hutchings & Romer, [1885]).

<sup>61</sup> Richard Wagner, *Joy to the Brave! Wedding Chorus from “Lohengrin”*, Words by A.J. Foxwell, ‘The Choral Handbook’, no. 178 (London: J. Curwen & Sons, [1889]).

<sup>62</sup> [Richard Wagner], *Bridal Chorus from “Lohengrin” by Wagner, Adapted and Arranged by A. [Albert] Ham* (London &c.: Novello & Company, 1924).

<sup>63</sup> See *Catalog of Copyright Entries. Part 4. Works of Art, etc. New Series* (1915), p. 132: ‘Here comes the bride; by Shannon Fife. © Mar. 9, 1915; 2 c. and description Mar. 11, 1915; L 4672.’ The film was produced by the Lubin Manufacturing Company; see <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0474061>> [accessed 12 August 2020]. Announcements of the new release appeared in *Moving Picture World*, 23/12, 20 March 1915, pp. 1690, 1804 and 1854, with a synopsis of the film on p. 1656.

Max Cryer has helpfully summarized the relevant facts.<sup>64</sup> According to this, it was Shannon Fife who came up with the title and it 'almost instantly became the point of reference for Wagner's melody', implying that the piece was somehow used in the music that accompanied the film.<sup>65</sup> Incidentally, whereas the meaning of these words is very different to that of the music's original text and context, the catchy words 'Here comes the Bride' fit Wagner's tune rather well and are easily remembered – just as Rimbault's earlier text 'Hail to the Bride'. Cryer also refers to two earlier alternative texts for the chorus:

In 1881 the New York-published Franklin Square Song Collection presented a version of English words: Guided by us, thrice happy pair [...] Then in 1912 The Victor Book of the Opera offered this translation: Faithful and true, we lead thee forth [...].<sup>66</sup>

While the first text, as in the opera, refers to the couple, the second refers to the bride only ('thee'). More intriguingly, Cryer furthermore presents some texts that were derived from the 1915 film title and thus referred more directly to the bride alone, such as 'Here comes the bride, friends by her side' and 'Here comes the bride, all dressed in white'.<sup>67</sup> The title from the film was obviously very memorable, if not popular, and Cryer observes that, in the following years, '*Here Comes the Bride* cropped up as the title for a Broadway play, a musical, and several more movies.'<sup>68</sup> In 1917, Max Marcin and Roy Atwell produced their Broadway play under this title, which was published soon afterwards.<sup>69</sup> Based on this play, another silent film appeared with the same title, in 1919, directed by John S. Robertson.<sup>70</sup> For this film a published 'cue sheet' by George W. Beynon is known which provides guidance for the music to be played at certain times during the film; Wagner's music is, however, not included.<sup>71</sup>

It was probably in the form of a musical that the title came to London. In July 1929, *The Times* reported: 'More than 50 artists will appear at the Palladium in a number entitled *Here Comes the Bride*.'<sup>72</sup> This announcement was repeated in adverts over the next months, and in the same year Arthur Schwartz published his music for a 'Musical comedy' of this title.<sup>73</sup> The show, produced by Julian Wylie with Schwartz's music

<sup>64</sup> Max Cryer, *Who Said That First?: The Curious Origins of Common Words and Phrases* (Titirangi: Exisle Publishing, 2010), pp. 129–30.

<sup>65</sup> No details about the film's accompanying music appear to have survived and the exact link between Shannon's film (title) and Wagner's piece still remains to be explored.

<sup>66</sup> Cryer, *Who Said That First?*, p. 129.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>69</sup> Max Marcin and Roy Atwell, *Here Comes the Bride: Comedy in Three Acts* (New York: S. French, [c. 1921]).

<sup>70</sup> *Catalogue of Copyright Entries. Part 1: Books, Group 2: Pamphlets, Leaflets, Contributions to Newspapers or Periodicals, etc.; Lectures, Sermons, Addresses for Oral Delivery; Dramatic Compositions; Maps; Motion Pictures*, New Series, vol. 16, no. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 72.

<sup>71</sup> George W. Beynon in 'Music for the Picture', *Moving Picture World*, 39/4, 25 January 1919, pp. 497–502 (p. 498).

<sup>72</sup> 'The Theatres', *The Times*, 15 July 1929, p. 12.

<sup>73</sup> Arthur Schwartz, [Six numbers of songs &c., from "Here comes the bride". Musical Comedy] (London: [s.n.], 1929).

premiered at the Piccadilly Theatre, opposite Regent Palace Hotel, in February 1930.<sup>74</sup> *The Times* announced it as “Here Comes The Bride.” A Musical Farcical Comedy.<sup>75</sup> Finally, towards the end of the decade there were two more plays in America and Britain using the title.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the title was also used for several individual numbers in other shows.<sup>77</sup> With the lack of further research into all these productions, it may only be assumed that they cited the tune of Wagner’s march in one way or another and thus furthered the link between music and title – but even if they did not include the music as such, at the very least they contributed to making the words of the title become an established and well-known phrase.

In this context, it should be noted that a detailed discussion of the chorus’s popularity in Germany, or indeed in other countries, would go beyond the scope of this short study. It may suffice to mention that in Germany, too, the music seems to have been popular on its own, even though possibly not as much as in Britain and the USA. In Germany, too, it was published in single editions, such as in 1899, but it appears that there were far fewer references to the march being used at weddings than in Britain and the USA.<sup>78</sup> Whereas in Germany there was obviously no immediate need for an alternative text, it is ironic that, in a curious twist of fate, the march in German has become almost better known as ‘Hier kommt die Braut’ – that is, as a literal translation of the English/American title – rather than under its original German words of ‘Treulich geführt’.

Overall, notwithstanding the prominent use of Wagner’s march for the bride’s entrance at four royal weddings and at several less prominent weddings, it would appear that the music’s association with the entrance of the bride was particularly strengthened only later, when it was more and more associated with words to this effect, especially following the 1915 Shannon film *Here comes the Bride* and the stage works with this title up to the 1930s. The words unmistakably define the music as heralding the bride’s arrival to her wedding, negating the music’s position in Wagner’s opera and contrasting its frequent use near the end of actual wedding ceremonies. It is very tempting to conclude that it was the association with these evocative words that ultimately contributed to Wagner’s march becoming the principal piece of music associated with the bride walking down the aisle. The strong association of the Bridal Chorus with the words of Shannon’s film title has lasted until the present day and the initial notes of the music are usually enough to conjure up the image of a bride walking down the aisle: the music has become so linked with this moment that it would today almost seem out of place anywhere else in the wedding ceremony.

<sup>74</sup> See Ken Bloom, *American Song: The Complete Musical Theatre Companion, 1877–1995*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), I, p. 471 (no. 1855, musical, opened 20 February 1930 at Piccadilly Theatre, London).

<sup>75</sup> ‘Concerts, &c.’, *The Times*, 1 March 1930, p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> Mildred Allen Butler, *Here Comes the Bride: A Comedy in One Act* (Toronto and New York: S. French, c.1937); and F. E. [Francis Evans] Baily, *Here Comes the Bride* (London: s.n., 1938).

<sup>77</sup> Bloom, *American Song*, lists four more shows that included numbers with this title (see index).

<sup>78</sup> Richard Wagner, *Brautlied Chor* “Treulich geführt ziehet dahin” [ausfrom] Lohengrin (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1899).



## The instrumental march

The strong association of the Bridal Chorus with certain words is in a way deceptive, for it is noteworthy that Wagner's Bridal 'Chorus' at weddings has rarely been performed as such – that is, sung as a chorus, as in the opera. Instead, it was (and is) usually performed in some instrumental arrangement, by an ensemble, or – most customarily, in fact – simply on the organ.

The most prominent early instrumental arrangement of the march was probably that by Franz Liszt, who had conducted the opera's Weimar premiere in 1850. By 1854, Liszt had produced a two-part piano arrangement of material from *Lohengrin*, with the first part made up of the prelude to Act III, incorporating the Bridal Chorus in the centre.<sup>79</sup> In fact, as Kenneth Hamilton has detailed, this scheme had been 'devised by Wagner for his Zürich concerts of May 1853 and quickly taken over by Liszt for his transcription'.<sup>80</sup> At those concerts in Zürich, the 'Hochzeitmusik [*sic*] und Brautlied' had been the third of the three numbers extracted from the music of *Lohengrin*.<sup>81</sup> The concerts included 'an orchestra of seventy and a chorus of 110' and the Bridal Chorus was then, in all likelihood, sung by the choir.<sup>82</sup> In relation to these 1853 Zürich concerts, Hugh Macdonald pointed out: 'Wagner, having himself never heard any of *Lohengrin*, was particularly anxious to hear the Prelude.' Wagner repeated the selection from *Lohengrin* at other concerts, notably in the aforementioned series of eight concerts in London, in 1855. Of the latter, Anne Dzamba Sessa has noted: 'Of his own music, he conducted only the Prelude, Procession to the Minster, and Wedding March and Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin* on 26 March, and the *Tannhäuser* Overture twice, on 14 May and 11 June.'<sup>83</sup> It was not until October 1858, however, that Wagner reportedly first heard his Bridal Chorus in an instrumental arrangement, played by a military band in St Mark's Square in Venice. According to an unidentified 'Augen- und Ohrenzeuge' ('Eye-and Ear-witness'), he then commented:

Mein 'Lohengrin', es ist das erste Mal, daß ich meinen 'Hochzeitsmarsch' von einem Orchester spielen höre! ... Sehen Sie, Landsmann, diesen Tag will ich mir merken und die Stelle, wo ich zuerst meinen 'Hochzeitsmarsch' gehört habe.

My 'Lohengrin': it is the first time that I hear my 'Wedding March' being played by an orchestra! ... Look, compatriot, I will remember this day and the place where I heard my 'Wedding March' for the first time.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Franz Liszt, *Aus Lohengrin* (A185/S446/R279): 1. Festspiel und Brautlied.

<sup>80</sup> Kenneth Hamilton, 'Wagner and Liszt: Elective Affinities', in *Richard Wagner and His World*, ed. by Thomas S. Grey (Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 27–64 (p. 39).

<sup>81</sup> On Wagner's concerts in Zürich in 1853 see Hugh Macdonald, *Music in 1853: The Biography of a Year* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), esp. pp. 50–53, with a reproduction of the programme for the concert on 18 May 1853 on p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>83</sup> Anne Dzamba Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (London: Associated University Press, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted after Eckart Kröplin, *Richard Wagner-Chronik* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler/Springer-Verlag, 2016), p. 271; the translation is my own. See also Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Briefe*, ed. by Gertrud Stobel and Wenner Wolf German] (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1998–2018), X: 17. August

Wagner's remark that this was the first time he had heard his 'Wedding March' played by an orchestra clarifies that he does not refer to the aforementioned instrumental processional march to the church at the end of Act II of the opera, which is orchestral anyway, but indeed to a version of the Bridal Chorus from Act III. It is then interesting to note that he himself called it a 'Hochzeitsmarsch': it was perhaps especially the instrumental arrangement that had turned his original Bridal Chorus into a *Hochzeitsmarsch*, or 'Wedding March' – almost into a new piece; and he thought it notable enough to point out that he had not heard it before then.

Following on from Liszt's 1854 piano arrangement, many other instrumental arrangements of a much simpler nature and of the Bridal Chorus alone appeared both in Britain and the USA, pointing to the popularity of the piece. In 1861, an arrangement by Carl Chevech was published in London.<sup>85</sup> In 1872, a piano arrangement by Jules Brissac was advertised under the title 'Wedding March', and in the same year William Callcott published an arrangement of 'Favorite Airs' from *Lohengrin* for piano duet (that is, for four hands) with optional further instruments.<sup>86</sup> Three years later, in the year of the London premiere of the full opera, E. F. Rimbault produced not only the re-texted choral version mentioned above, but also a piano arrangement of the Bridal Chorus, now titled 'Bridal March'.<sup>87</sup> In the following year, G. F. West published another piano arrangement, again with the title 'Bridal March'.<sup>88</sup> Arrangements continued to be popular and there was, for instance, another one for four hands, by A. Dobigny in 1899.<sup>89</sup> With reference to its being termed a 'march' in these arrangements, it will be worth remembering that, as seen above, the piece was also labelled as 'BRIDAL MARCH' in the programme of music in the printed order of service at the 1885 wedding.<sup>90</sup> This titling, often even without mentioning the piece's origins in the opera, was apparently soon sufficient enough to denote this particular piece: Wagner's march appears to have become disassociated from the opera and its context rather early – taking on a life of its own, as it were, and becoming famous and popular in its own right.

Apart from these British publications, in the USA, instrumental arrangements of the march were published, for instance, in the music magazine *The Musical Visitor*: an

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1858 bis 31. März 1859, ed. by Andreas Mielke with editorial work by Isabel Kraft (1994), pp. 471–73: Commentary on a letter from Richard Wagner to Minna Wagner, Venice, 28 October 1858 (letter itself on pp. 117–21); this quotation on p. 472 (commentary on lines 90–92 of the letter).

<sup>85</sup> Carl Chevech, *Epithalamium from Wagner's Opera Lohengrin, Transcribed for the Pianoforte* (London, s.n., [1861]).

<sup>86</sup> See the advertisement in *Illustrated London News*, 16 November 1872, p. 472 ('WEDDING MARCH in WAGNERS LOHENGRIN. Arranged for the Pianoforte by JULES BRISSAC. Price 3b. METZLEE and CO.'): and Richard Wagner, *Favorite Airs from Richard Wagner's Opera Lohengrin: Arranged as Piano-forte Duets with ad lib Accts. for Flute, Violin & Violoncello by William H. Callcott*, 2 vols (London: Hutchings & Romer, [1872]).

<sup>87</sup> Richard Wagner, *The Bridal March, from Wagner's Opera Lohengrin: Transcribed for the Pianoforte by E. F. Rimbault* (London: Chappell & Co., [1875]). For the choral version see note 59.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Wagner, *The Bridal March, from Wagner's Opera Lohengrin: Arranged for the Pianoforte by G.F. West* (London: Robert Cocks & Co., [1876]).

<sup>89</sup> Richard Wagner, *Bridal March from Lohengrin ... Arranged by A. Dobigny* (London: E. Donajowski, [1899]).

<sup>90</sup> See note 26.

arrangement for flute or violin and piano in 1884, and for piano solo in 1889.<sup>91</sup> Such straightforward, relatively easy arrangements helped make the music accessible to wider audiences up and down the country; through them, the music could enter people's homes and, to put it poetically, people's hearts.

### A questionable and questioned choice

It is not without a certain irony that Wagner's and Mendelssohn's two marches have, for so long, been considered the 'classic combination' for weddings. As Lawrence Kramer sharply summarized, this combination results in 'pairing the arch-anti-Semite of Western music with his one named musical nemesis in the infamous article "Judaism in Music"'.<sup>92</sup> Yet, quite apart from this clash and notwithstanding that, from a historiographical point of view, the combination of these two marches could be seen as a reconciling gesture, their use at weddings evoked pronounced public discussions for different reasons for quite some time, and across denominational boundaries. In the same way as Mendelssohn's Wedding March, Wagner's Bridal March suffered a long period of attack, with the main point of criticism being that these pieces with their secular origins and background should not be played at weddings in church.<sup>93</sup>

Regarding the use of Wagner's Bridal Chorus at weddings, the ultimate seal of approval, if not a sign of its popularity, was surely its inclusion at the four royal weddings of 1885, 1889, 1893 and 1896. However, this was not an uncontroversial choice. These royal weddings were the most prominent and most reported occasions at which the music was heard, and it is in connection with these that there appears to have been the earliest criticism of the choice of Wagner's march to accompany the bride down the aisle. The notice in *The Graphic* on the music at Princess Beatrice's wedding in 1885 included the line that 'the bride walked up the church to the beautiful, though utterly inappropriate bridal music from Wagner's *Lohengrin*'.<sup>94</sup> No explanation was given as to why the music was considered 'utterly inappropriate'; the lack of detail could mean that this was generally understood and did not need an explanation. The fact that *The Graphic* referred to the music in these terms indicates that it did not refer to its musical qualities as such. There had, in fact, been some rather negative criticism of the music in *Lohengrin*, and in particular of the Bridal Chorus, following the 1855 London performances. Interestingly, reviewers' principal criticism then was the chorus's tunelessness, comparing the music to that of second-rate composers (naming Adolphe Adam, Ricci and Coppola).<sup>95</sup> However, an explanation of why Wagner's march may

<sup>91</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Bridal Chorus: Lohengrin', in *Musical Visitor*, 13/8 (August 1884), pp. 221–22 (in A major); and 18/3 (March 1889), pp. 80–81 (in B♭ major).

<sup>92</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 42. However, for Kramer 'there is no real irony here, even in the culmination of fame in transcendental obscurity, because history has no author: there is no ironist'.

<sup>93</sup> For the criticism of Mendelssohn's march see Range, 'Mendelssohn's Wedding March'.

<sup>94</sup> 'Music', *The Graphic*, 818, 1 August 1885, p. 123, under 'THE ROYAL MARRIAGE.'

<sup>95</sup> For reviews of Wagner's performance see, for example, *Musical World*, 31 March 1855, pp. 200–02 and 203–04; and *Athenaeum*, 31 March 1855, p. 385.

have been considered ‘inappropriate’ at the 1885 royal wedding was provided by Betts in his aforementioned report of that occasion. With reference to the frequent use of the bridal march for the entrance of the bride, Betts opined:

A more inappropriate selection could hardly be made, for in Wagner’s opera the newly-married couple are parted on their wedding night, never again to meet on earth.<sup>96</sup>

What Betts criticized was not the wrong chronology, so to speak, of having the Bridal March at the beginning, at the entrance of the bride instead of at the couple’s leaving; rather, he drew attention to its tragic context within the opera. This chimes with the reasons expressed four years later, in a report on the music at the 1889 royal wedding. The American periodical *The Musical Visitor* observed that Wagner’s march, ‘although now popular at weddings’, was ‘more appropriate for the beauty of its music than for its association with the sad story of the opera’, explaining that in the opera the bride is separated from her husband on the wedding day.<sup>97</sup>

Associations of Wagner’s march with the opera *Lohengrin* appear not to have been a mere theoretical construct of reviewers but may have been in more people’s minds. There is a high-profile example from the 1885 royal wedding, for instance, where the music may have called the opera to mind. According to David Duff, who refers to recollections of the bridal couple’s son, it had been Queen Victoria herself who had insisted on the bridegroom wearing the white uniform of the Prussian *Gardes du corps*, the result of which ‘appeared out of character with the village setting, and the mischievous Princess of Wales dubbed him “Beatrice’s Lohengrin”’.<sup>98</sup> Such a reference to the legendary Swan-Knight may have been provoked by the dazzling white uniform, with its helmet crowned by a silver eagle, as much as by the music of Wagner’s Bridal March. Assuming that this description is authentic, this association, and maybe more notably the inference that people understood it, is rather meaningful; it would indicate that there was some wider awareness of the origins of the Bridal March in Wagner’s opera – although this was perhaps not necessarily understood as a bad omen.

In any case, in its form as a purely instrumental piece, without the words, and possibly under a changed title, the clash of the music’s original text and context with its new, appropriated use would probably have been – nay, is – apparent to only very few people. With reference to the two marches by Wagner and Mendelssohn, Kramer observed:

Appropriations like that of the wedding marches are mechanical, not allusive, mere cogs in the citation machine of culture in which phrases, signifiers, tropes, images, and gestures are endlessly recycled and redeployed with little or no reference to their ‘original’ contexts.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Betts, ‘Marriage Music’, p. 21.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Royal Wedding Music’, *The Musical Visitor*, 18/9, September 1889, p. 227.

<sup>98</sup> David Duff, *Hessian Tapestry* (London: Frederick Muller, 1967), p. 209. Duff (note 15, on p. 387) refers to ‘Information from the Marquess of Carisbrooke’ – that is, Alexander Mountbatten (1886–1960), formerly known as Prince Alexander of Battenberg, the eldest son of Princess Beatrice and Prince Henry of Battenberg, and from 1917 first and only Marquess of Carisbrooke. Many modern authors have cited this appellation but without giving a proper reference.

<sup>99</sup> Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, p. 42.

Thus, the two marches' original contexts, although they may have triggered the initial association of these pieces with real-world weddings, have all but lost their significance. All the same, the music of these pieces has become meaningful and powerful in itself – in Wagner's case a musical *chiffre* or code for any bride arriving at any wedding celebration. Like a national anthem or a Christmas carol, Wagner's Bridal March does not need any context; rather, it is powerful enough to create context by itself.

### To ban or not to ban?

Apart from the pronounced British examples from the 1880s seen above, discussions regarding the 'appropriateness' or suitability of the music for weddings appear to have been especially prominent between the late 1920s and the 1970s – a period when Wagner's march was also most popular for weddings – and, at first, especially in the USA. In the late 1920s, it was obviously in an attempt to enable the music's use at wedding ceremonies that Wagner's piece was published in New York as a 'Wedding Anthem', arranged 'for use at solemnization of matrimony, and adapted to words appropriate to that office'.<sup>100</sup> An actual, wider 'ban' on the music seems to have been prominently imposed for the first time in the 1930s, in places as far apart as a Cleveland Protestant church and a Hungarian Roman Catholic diocese.<sup>101</sup> All the same, back in Britain, an arrangement of the march by Robert Ashfield was included in Oxford University Press's *Book of Wedding Pieces for Organ*, published in 1939; and there were various other editions throughout the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>102</sup> However, Wagner's music, perceived as 'unsuitable', came under attack again in the 1950s, and again especially in the USA. One of the most detailed listings of the criticism against Wagner's march, and other music, was usefully provided by Frederick Young in 1957, in the American journal *The Living Church*. He recorded:

In 1952 the Joint Commission on Church Music published a pamphlet entitled 'Music For Church Weddings.' In the pamphlet the Joint Commission explicitly stated that the traditional Wedding Marches from Wagner and Mendelssohn were especially unfitted and undesirable for a Church wedding.<sup>103</sup>

The Joint Commission's criticism was based mainly on the points discussed above: regarding Wagner's march, it rested foremost on the secular origins and context of the music but also more specifically on the fact that in the opera the music accompanies the couple's going to their wedding night, which meant that 'consequently, the connotations of the music are sensuous and indecent for church usage'. Furthermore, another

<sup>100</sup> Richard Wagner, *Wedding Anthem. (Bridal Chorus [...] Arr. for Use at Solemnization of Matrimony, and Adapted to Words Appropriate to that Office)*, (New York: The H.W. Gray Co., [c.1928]).

<sup>101</sup> See 'Kiss at Altar Banned: Cleveland Pastor also Bars Lohengrin March at Weddings', *New York Times*, 14 July 1938, p. 23; and 'Hungarian Bishop Bans two Wedding Marches', *New York Times*, 5 December 1938, p. 10, referring to 'Bishop Shoy of the Fejervar Diocese'.

<sup>102</sup> *A Book of Wedding Pieces for Organ*, ed. by Gordon Phillips (London: Oxford University Press, [1939]).

<sup>103</sup> Frederick Young, 'What's Wrong with the Traditional Wedding Marches?', *Living Church*, 135 (1957), 14–17 (p. 14). Young at the time was 'a Harvard under-graduate'.

issue was that in the opera the marriage did not last long and ‘it would be “bad luck” to play such music at one’s wedding’. Three years after the Joint Commission pamphlet, in 1955, Wagner’s march had been among those pieces that were banned in the Roman Catholic archdioceses of Chicago and New York.<sup>104</sup>

In his 1957 article, Young overall defended pieces such as the Wagner and Mendelssohn marches at weddings by way of discussion and comparison, referring to, among other aspects, ‘the many hymns of secular origin’.<sup>105</sup> He pointed out the inconsistency that ‘a large number of the pieces which the Joint Commission suggests to be used in place of the regular wedding marches are themselves of purely secular, concert hall origin’, and he concluded:

After all, both the processional ‘Bridal Chorus’ and the recessional ‘Wedding March’ are not used in conjunction with any part of the marriage service proper, but rather they are like the ‘Fireworks Music,’ just music before and after the service.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless, the constant repetition of expressed disapproval appears to have had some success. In Britain, Mendelssohn’s Wedding March had been on the out since the early 1960s – particularly after its much publicised and discussed replacement at the royal wedding of the Duke of Kent in York Minster in 1961.<sup>107</sup> In the wake of this, the English Congregational minister, composer and musicologist Erik Routley, in a biting contribution to the Protestant paper *The British Weekly*, attacked especially also Wagner’s march and postulated:

Lohengrin really must go: there can be little question about that. The point of Lohengrin is that it tells the congregation to get up out of their seats and welcome the bride. Far better to have the bride enter the church while the congregation is singing praise. That overcomes the practical difficulty of arousing the congregation, and gets rid of Wagner painlessly.<sup>108</sup>

While Routley did not make his arguments against Wagner’s piece more explicit in the remainder of his article, his reservations appear to be mainly the fact that it is a ‘march’, together with the secular origins in the opera, its being an arrangement and, after all, its not being a ‘a complete piece’ but an extract.

The issue of using certain music at weddings, and particularly Wagner’s and Mendelssohn’s wedding marches, was again in the news in the early 1970s. It was widely reported that the Vatican’s ‘Congregation for Divine Worship’ in its official bulletin *Notitiae* had responded to a question by stating that both wedding marches, as well as some other pieces (namely Handel’s ‘Largo’ from *Xerxes* and Gounod’s *Ave Maria*), since being ‘profane music’ were deemed ‘unsuitable’ and should not be played

<sup>104</sup> ‘Music Selections Banned in Church: Chicago Cardinal Rules Two Wedding Marches, Eight “Ave Marias” as Unfit’, *New York Times*, 14 October 1955, p. 23; and also ““Lohengrin” Ban Holds in Archdiocese Here’, *New York Times*, 15 October 1955, p. 8.

<sup>105</sup> Young, ‘What’s Wrong’, p. 15.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16. Young lists examples of the suggested alternative pieces.

<sup>107</sup> See Range, ‘Mendelssohn’s Wedding March’, pp. 107–09.

<sup>108</sup> Erik Routley, ‘Let’s Leave out Lohengrin: And make the Wedding “March” a Matter for Marriage-Guidance’, *British Weekly*, 145/3902, 26 October 1961, pp. 1, 12.

at a church wedding.<sup>109</sup> However, one may wonder how far the recommendations or verdicts against certain music were ever followed. In response to the Vatican Commission's recommendation not to have such music as Wagner's and Mendelssohn's wedding marches, George Armstrong commented in *The Guardian*:

This Vatican ruling is another one which is likely to be ignored in some parts of the world and in itself is not going to enhance the Church's authority.<sup>110</sup>

Referring to an 'English spokesman', Armstrong pointed out that categorization as an unsuitable piece of music was merely the personal opinion of 'certain Church musicians' and was only 'a viewpoint without official backing'. *The Times* also reported about the issue and similarly emphasized that this was not a ruling but only guidance.<sup>111</sup> Nonetheless, the danger of public confusion was apparently so strong that the Vatican shortly afterwards issued a clarification to explain that it had not directly forbidden this music.<sup>112</sup> In the late 1970s, in her study *Richard Wagner and the English*, Anne Sessa still observed with an implied self-answer: 'It is interesting to consider how many thousands of modern couples have been married to the strains of the Wedding March.'<sup>113</sup> Yet, not long afterwards, in 1981, the much publicized and very influential wedding of Prince Charles, Prince of Wales (now Charles III) and Lady Diana Spencer further inspired alternative choices of music. In the wake of this wedding, James Barron recorded in the *New York Times* that both Wagner's and Mendelssohn's marches had lately declined in popularity and were 'being eclipsed by Baroque marches and elegant ceremonial pieces'; and he explained:

Many brides say it would be unthinkable to choose anything but the Wagner and the Mendelssohn. But a growing number of brides say they avoid the two because they believe they have lost their meaning as a result of overuse.<sup>114</sup>

There do not seem to be any up-to-date statistics on the current, early twenty-first-century use of either march at weddings. In recent decades, with an enormous variety of musical choices for weddings – and indeed any church service – the criticism of some classical music as being unsuitable in church appears to have ebbed away. In the modern age, where parameters and values have shifted considerably, there seem to be no more pronounced arguments against the use of certain classical music at a religious wedding ceremony – a fact that, incidentally, stands in curious contrast to the rule that, at least in Britain, religious music of any sort is not allowed at civil ceremonies in a register office.

<sup>109</sup> George Armstrong, 'A Halt to Wedding Marches?', *The Guardian*, 15 April 1971, p. 2. It may come as a surprise to see that Gounod's *Ave Maria* was considered 'profane': the reason might be that, although its text is obviously sacred, its music is based on J. S. Bach's C major Prelude from the first volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

<sup>110</sup> See Armstrong, 'A Halt to Wedding Marches?', p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> 'Vatican Recommends Ban on Wedding March', *The Times*, 58147, 15 April 1971, p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> See 'No Wedding March Ban Says Vatican', *Irish Times*, 17 April 1971, p. 13.

<sup>113</sup> Anne Dzamba Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (London: Associated University Press, 1979), p. 152, note 45.

<sup>114</sup> James Barron, 'Weddings March to New Tunes', *New York Times*, 24 June 1983, p. A12.

## A possible future?

Notwithstanding the long-standing criticism of the use of Wagner's Bridal March at weddings, the continuous steady stream of arrangements that have been published up until the present day vouches for its persistent popularity. Even if these days the march is perhaps played at fewer and fewer weddings, it still seems that no album or compilation of wedding music would be complete without it. On screen and stage it still serves as the most recognizable musical code to evoke the image of a bride or an impending wedding.

Even though Wagner's march today – as in the discussions since the 1960s at least – may often be rejected as being too clichéd to be used at a wedding, on a different level it has, if anything, become but more widely acceptable and relevant. It is tempting to interpret that the Bridal Chorus's secular origins – criticized so often in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches – are rather one of its fortes. The music is neither inherently nor implicitly sacred, nor even 'church-like'. At the same time, however, it is also not overly secular (like a drinking song, for instance) and is rather solemn in a neutral way. Therefore, Wagner's Bridal March can easily be used by couples of all faiths, or indeed no faith. As early as 1922, one writer went so far as to suggest that Wagner's march was 'an ideal thing for a Moslem marriage' and explained that

it is written for words that embody the doctrines of 'sacred sensuality' sanctioned by the Koran; yet the Turks will have none of it – they leave it entirely to the Christians!<sup>115</sup>

The author seems to be referring to the neutral musical quality of Wagner's piece, lamenting that it is not more widely used in other cultures, and implying that the music works in a cross-cultural way.

Similarly, in the early 1950s, a report about modern paganism in Malaya looked at newly built villages with Chinese settlers and observed that 'the whole life of these Chinese settlers in the new villages is a curious mixture of old and new'. Notably, the piece that served as the first example of how 'Western customs and Western music are brought into the pagan customs of the Chinese' was none other than Wagner's Bridal Chorus, when the report pointed out that the brass band at a village wedding 'among all the superstition of a Chinese wedding plays the usual Western music, the known wedding march "Treulich geführt, zieht [*sic*] dahin...!"'<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> 'Ecclesiastical Music', *New Music Review and Church Music Review*, 21/246 (May 1922), pp. 196–97 (p. 197).

<sup>116</sup> See H. Büchner, 'Modernes Heidentum in Malaya', translation of an extract from *The Millions* [the journal of the China Inland Mission], by 'Mrs. Stanley Rowe', *Evangelisches Missions Magazin*, 97/1, (January 1953), p. 29: 'Das ganze Leben dieser chinesischen Ansiedler in den neuen Dörfern ist eine merkwürdige Mischung von Altem und Neuem, von althergebrachten Sitten und modernen Annehmlichkeiten von tief verwurzelttem Aberglauben und neuzeitlicher Verderblichkeit. Westliche Gebräuche und westliche Musik werden in heidnische Gebräuche des Chinesen hineingetragen. Die Blechmusik, die man für das dörfliche Hochzeitsfest angeworben hat, spielt inmitten all des Aberglaubens einer chinesischen Hochzeit die übliche westliche Musik, den bekannten Hochzeitsmarsch: «Treulich geführt, zieht [*sic*] dahin ...!»'. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to find the original, English article.



Considering its originally secular background, Wagner's Bridal March is also a viable choice for today's increasingly popular civil ceremonies, which by their regulations have to be devoid of any religious connotations. If one were to put it romantically, with its universal appeal the music of Wagner's Bridal Chorus has the potential to create a kind of link between lovers all around the world; it is truly music that crosses boundaries: boundaries of religion, society and culture across both time and space. This gives it an additional, unifying quality and status achieved by very few other pieces of music. In fact, this applies to both wedding marches – to Wagner's and to Mendelssohn's – and from this point of view these two pieces are true worldwide assets from the repertoire of Western classical music: being meaningful to a global, multi-faceted audience, encompassing several generations. In a way, then, one could even argue that these two pieces have achieved a kind of 'sanctity' of their own: while some will still frown upon their use at a religious ceremony and others sniff at their over-use and almost kitsch-like fame, it is precisely the incredibly wide recognizability and appeal of these two marches that may arguably constitute a new sort of neutral sanctity beyond reproach.

As late as 1979, Elizabeth Laverack could observe about Wagner's piece that, 'Today, the *Bridal Chorus* still has a mystique of its own, and many a bride would not dream of walking up the aisle to anything else.'<sup>117</sup> This strong 'mystical' status has now almost gone. However, whether it is still used at actual weddings or not, Wagner's Bridal Chorus has lost barely any of its associative qualities and continues to conjure up the image of a wedding ceremony, and in particular the arrival of a bride clad in white. Wagner's march, with its straightforward and memorable melody, is the apogee of all bridal entrance music. It ranks, without doubt, among the most famous (and most evocative) tunes in the world.

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<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Laverack, *With this Ring: 100 Years of Marriage – Based on the H. Samuel Wedding Collection* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1979), p. 87.