

## Press Information

6 April 2022

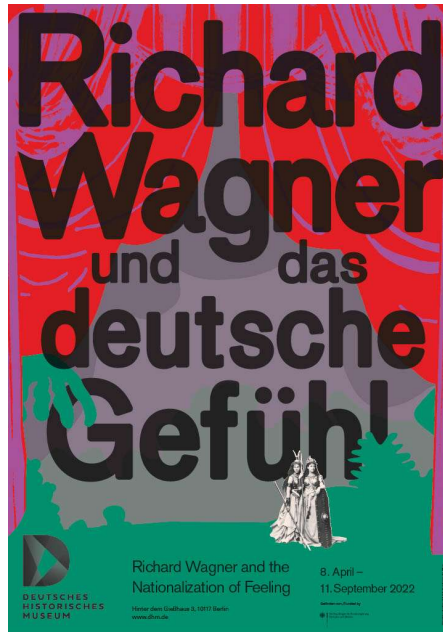


DEUTSCHES  
HISTORISCHES  
MUSEUM

## Richard Wagner and the Nationalization of Feeling

From 8 April 2022 in the Deutsches Historisches Museum

Composer and theatre reformer, court music director and festival founder, revolutionary and exile, entrepreneur and critic of capitalism, debtor and anti-Semite: Richard Wagner experienced and influenced the 19<sup>th</sup> century in many different roles – with ramifications that are still felt today. The Deutsches Historisches Museum presents Wagner not only as a witness and critic of the political and social upheavals of his time, but in particular as a controversial artist and strategist who knew how to integrate society's sensitivities into his work and to stage them as the essence of German culture. The debates about the degree to which Wagner's pronounced anti-Semitism influenced his works and his critique of Modernity still go on today.



In the exhibition **“Richard Wagner and the Nationalization of Feeling” (8 April to 11 September 2022)** Wagner is shown as a highly successful technician of feelings who, in an increasingly commercialised world, positioned the social significance of art and the artist in a new light. His artistic ascent, however, would not have been possible without a modern market for art and music. To this end he developed marketing strategies in which emotions played an essential role. His ideas of music drama as an artistic synthesis, a “Gesamtkunstwerk”, were part of his criticism of Modernity and were marked by his ambition to change society as a whole.

**Raphael Gross, President of the Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum:** “This year, the DHM is occupied with two prominent German figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the contemporaries Karl Marx and Richard Wagner. Their works had an enormous impact on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which persisted on into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And both became icons of their politically opposite camps: Marx for the Left, Wagner for the Right. The Wagner exhibition deals not only with the musician. We are also interested in how he as a writer generated a German national feeling and to what degree this was connected with his anti-Semitism.”

**Curator Michael P. Steinberg:** “‘Richard Wagner and the Nationalization of Feeling’ offers a deep dive into the origins of modernity. Wagner’s art and thinking proved essential for the invention of a modern mythology – on the one hand, the drive for innovation, on the other, the desire for a return to origins. Through this

Deutsches Historisches Museum

Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit  
Daniela Lange  
Unter den Linden 2  
10117 Berlin

T +49 30 20304-410  
presse@dhm.de

www.dhm.de

polarity of modernism and reaction, Wagner remains a key figure for our own time.”

### **Wagner and the nationalization of feelings**

Starting with the undiminished polarisation that Richard Wagner still provokes, the exhibition relates his life and work to the movements and sentiments of his era. It focuses on four basic feelings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that acted as driving forces for the circumstances of the time and for Wagner’s ideas: Alienation and Belonging, Eros and Disgust. Framed by an introductory Prologue and an Epilogue on the history of Wagner’s reception, these four chapters examine how Wagner perceived the emotional conditions of society and reacted to them artistically: What feelings did he stage and construct? How did he teach his audience to feel and – in his later works – to feel German? And what role did his writings play in this process?

While Karl Marx made the subject of alienation a central element of his social and economic critique, Wagner was interested in the alienated individual and, in particular, the figure of the artist. In his essay “Art and Revolution” (1849), he derived the will to radical aesthetic and political renewal from the experience of alienation. His artistic creativity is firmly rooted in the context of the omnipresent search for a German identity that marked politics, science and art after the founding of the German Empire. For this reason, too, the question of who should belong and who should not belong took on greater importance in Wagner’s works. The exhibition explores how the specifically “German” element in Wagner’s works became the “Wagner brand” and how the mutual experiencing of staged feelings of “folk” and “nation” became the benchmark, particularly in his founding of the Bayreuth Festival. The different versions of his essay “Judaism in Music” from the years 1850 and 1869 show that Wagner’s distinct anti-Semitism and his nationalism were closely tied together.

The installation “Schwarzalbenreich”, specially created by the principal director and intendant of the Komische Oper Berlin, Barrie Kosky, is also devoted to the topic of anti-Semitism. Out of the darkness of a room within a room come the strains of a sound collage of anti-Semitic Wagner quotes translated into Yiddish, mixed with passages from the antisemitically portrayed characters Alberich and Mime from the *Ring des Nibelungen* and Sixtus Beckmesser from the *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, as well as synagogue singing.

Alongside original objects from the DHM’s own collections, the exhibition presents top-quality items on loan from Germany, Austria and Switzerland: personal writings and objects that belonged to Wagner, paintings, drawings, photographs,

sculptures, theatre props, manuscripts and scores that show Wagner's mindset and oeuvre in relation to various junctures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In each chapter, excerpts from performances, audio stations and short interviews with celebrated Wagner singer Waltraud Meier and opera director Stefan Herheim help visitors to experience the fundamental feelings of the time. An epilogue throws light on the history of Germany's volatile relationship with Wagner. The exhibition ends with a number of current voices from the fields of culture, academia and politics on the importance of Richard Wagner today.

A German-language volume, published by wbg Theiss (272 pages with ca. 120 colour illustrations), supplements the exhibition. The DHM's digital format **MORE STORY** offers an introduction to the subject matter of the exhibition and related topics in German and English.

### **Karl Marx and Richard Wagner in the Deutsches Historisches Museum**

Parallel to "Richard Wagner and the Nationalization of Feeling", the DHM is showing the exhibition "**Karl Marx and Capitalism**" (until 21 August 2022). It portrays Marx as a sharp critic of Modernity and capitalism and focuses on topics that have lost none of their explosiveness: religious and socio-critical controversies, anti-Semitism, revolution and violence, new technologies, destruction of nature, global economic crises, and international protest and emancipation movements. The exhibition links Marx's historization to questions of his topicality. At the same time, it takes a critical look at the worldwide reception of his theories in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.