## The Ring motive



The Ring motive, which appears over 60 times in <u>Das Rheingold</u>, portrays the ring itself as passive in nature. Although the ring is cursed, it is neither inherently good nor evil, but assumes the qualities of those with whom it comes into contact. Because every character uses the ring differently, the ring's quality is similarly multifaceted. Wagner scores the Ring motive in many different ways to reflect this.

Wagner uses the combination of horn and bassoon five times, three times alone and twice with strings. Each of these statements makes a reference to the ring as payment. In the following three instances, when the Ring motive is played by the horn and bassoon alone, the payment refers to the ransom of gold requested of the gods by the giants.

Ring Ex 1:	iv, 574;	Hn, Fag.	Fafner: Now add the final part of the ransom.
Ring Ex 2:	iv, 756;	Hn, Fag.	Fafner: Now blink upon Freia's face. You'll see the ring no more.
Ring Ex 3:	iv, 803;	Hn, Fag.	Wotan: An evil price paid for the hall.

In Example 1, the giants are trying to collect the remainder of their ransom of gold from the gods. All that remains to be forfeited, say the giants, is the ring on Wotan's finger. Wotan insists on his right to keep the ring. At this point, the Ring motive appears in the horn and bassoon as Fafner orders Wotan to add the ring to the pile of gold. The second example of horn and bassoon appears when the giants look for a way to divide the hoard. Loge advises Fafner to take the treasure, and Fasolt to take the ring. The giants argue about this judgment, and Fafner slays Fasolt. Fafner then wrests the ring from the corpse, and tells the gods that the ransom has been paid as the horn and bassoon play the Ring motive. The third example occurs when Wotan wishes to descend to Erda to learn of his future. Fricka suggests that he remain instead at Valhalla. The Ring motive then appears to accompany Wotan's gloomy reflection on the price that he paid for his castle.

In the following example, the horn and bassoon play the Ring motive in combination with the strings. Tremolo violin, viola, and cello are added to represent Fafner's mental instability as he grabs for the ring, which he believes is the payment owed him.<sup>1</sup>

Ring Ex 4: iv, 747; Hn, Fag, Trem. Vn, Br, Vc. Fafner: The ring is mine!

There is also a combination that includes a cello with the horn-bassoon scoring.

Ring Ex 5: i, 566;. Hn, Fag, Vc Alberich: I wrest from the rock the gold, forging the ring of revenge.

This example occurs toward the end of the first scene, where Alberich, after attempting to court the Rheinmaidens, decides to compensate for his rejection by stealing their gold as his "payment."

While the horn-bassoon scoring of the Ring motive refers to the ring as payment, Wagner scores the Ring motive in the horns alone to refer to the ring's connection with the gods of Valhalla on three separate occasions.

Ring Ex 6:	Int. 1, 48;	Hn.	(Discussed in Int. 1 analysis.)
Ring Ex 7:	ii, 74;	Hn.	Wotan: Did Fricka harbor such greed when she craved for the hall?
Ring Ex 8:	ii, 679;	Hn.	Fricka: Would the golden trinket make some jewelry?

All three examples refer to the gods of Valhalla, most notably Fricka. In the interlude example, Wagner lays the groundwork for future horn references by placing the motive directly before the overture to the second

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Wagner often uses string tremolo to add a surreal dimension to certain moments. At times, the device is used to represent mental instability. (See article on tremolo.)

scene as Wotan and Fricka lie asleep in a flowery bank.<sup>2</sup> The second example occurs when Wotan reminds Fricka of the glory of the hall. The setting appears again when Fricka asks Loge about why the gods want the Rheingold. Since the horn is generally connected with other godly references in <u>Das</u> Rheingold<sup>3</sup>, it seems that Wagner used the horn to establish a reference to the gods of Valhalla that a listener might identify as an underlying unifying quality in the work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This overture is made up of the first statements of the Valhalla motive, which is scored for full brass with tubas used in place of horns. This will be discussed further in the article concerning the Valhalla motive.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Notably, the strongest statement of the Golden Apples motive (ii, 323) appears in the horn accompanying the voice.